LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission

Nairobi, Kenya

REPORT

October 1998

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

"Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission"

LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission

October 25 to 29, 1998
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The opinions expressed in this publication reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Lutheran World Federation.

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FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the report of the LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission held in Nairobi, Kenya, from October 25 to 29, 1998. The report contains the *Findings and Recommendations* of the Consultation, as well as a *Message* to the member churches and mission partners worldwide. It also contains the keynote addresses and the various presentations discussed in the three tracks.

The Consultation was conceived and designed as a response to and in partial fulfilment of the LWF Department for Mission and Development's (DMD) Terms of Reference which indicate that the Department "is based on the calling of churches to participate in God's mission by proclaiming in word and deed both the presence and the coming of the kingdom, by conveying the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to the world, and by exemplifying in concrete acts a responsible care for all aspects of the life of the human community." The Department for Mission and Development seeks, more specifically, among other activities, to "carry out programmes with LWF member churches in respect to their task of mission and evangelism within the many contexts in which the churches are present".

Planned already in 1995 and approved by Council in 1996, this Consultation gained added momentum and significance from the Ninth Assembly's emphasis on mission and evangelism. The Assembly voted, among other resolutions, "to affirm mission and evangelism as central to the task of the Federation and the member churches, and to ensure that the relevant departments coordinate their work on this emphasis" (Hong Kong Report, P. 63). At the Assembly the churches committed themselves "to strengthen our missiological and missionary efforts, to deepen our understanding of the gospel, and to explore new ways of sharing God's love with people who do not yet or no longer know Christ as their Lord and Savior" (Ibid. P.53).

The aim of the Consultation was to spearhead discussions on relevant missiological issues and practices, serving as a spring-board for follow-up programmes. It was not expected to provide ready answers to complex missiological problems or definitive directions to missional inquiries, but rather to serve as a forum for participatory engagement in the process of rethinking and reformulating the mission task of the church, given the fact that the centre of gravity of Christianity has now moved to the south.

The theme of the Consultation: *Into the Third Millennium, Together in God's Mission*, informed the objectives of the Consultation:

- to engage in theological study of "mission across all frontiers", i.e. mission from a holistic approach, taking into account the challenges of the 21st Century and the resolutions of the Ninth Assembly;

- to discuss partnership and relational issues between and among all partners concerned: member churches, mission and development agencies, the LWF;

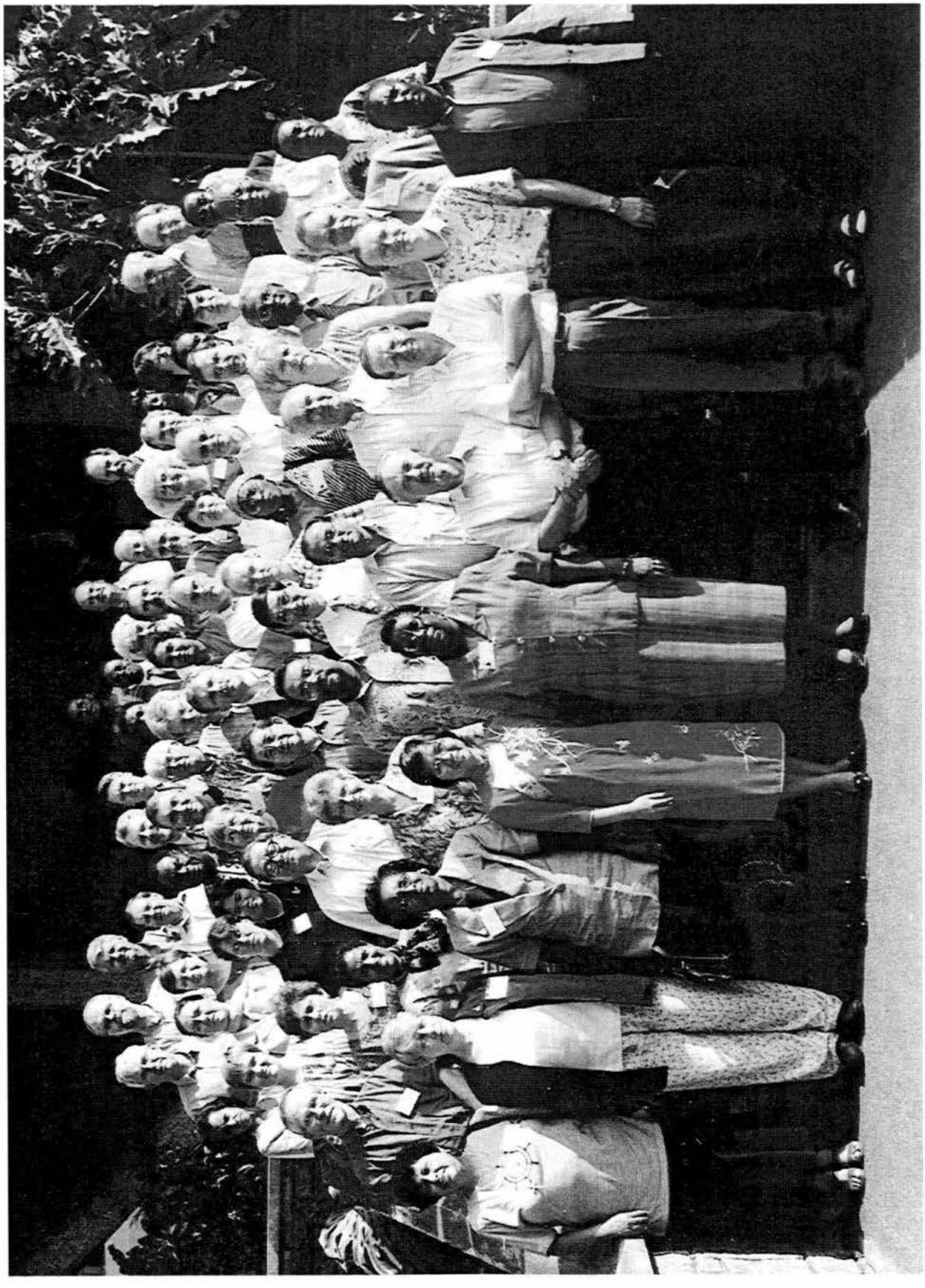
- to exchange information and experience on new creative ways of doing mission and discuss burning practical issues in mission implementation.

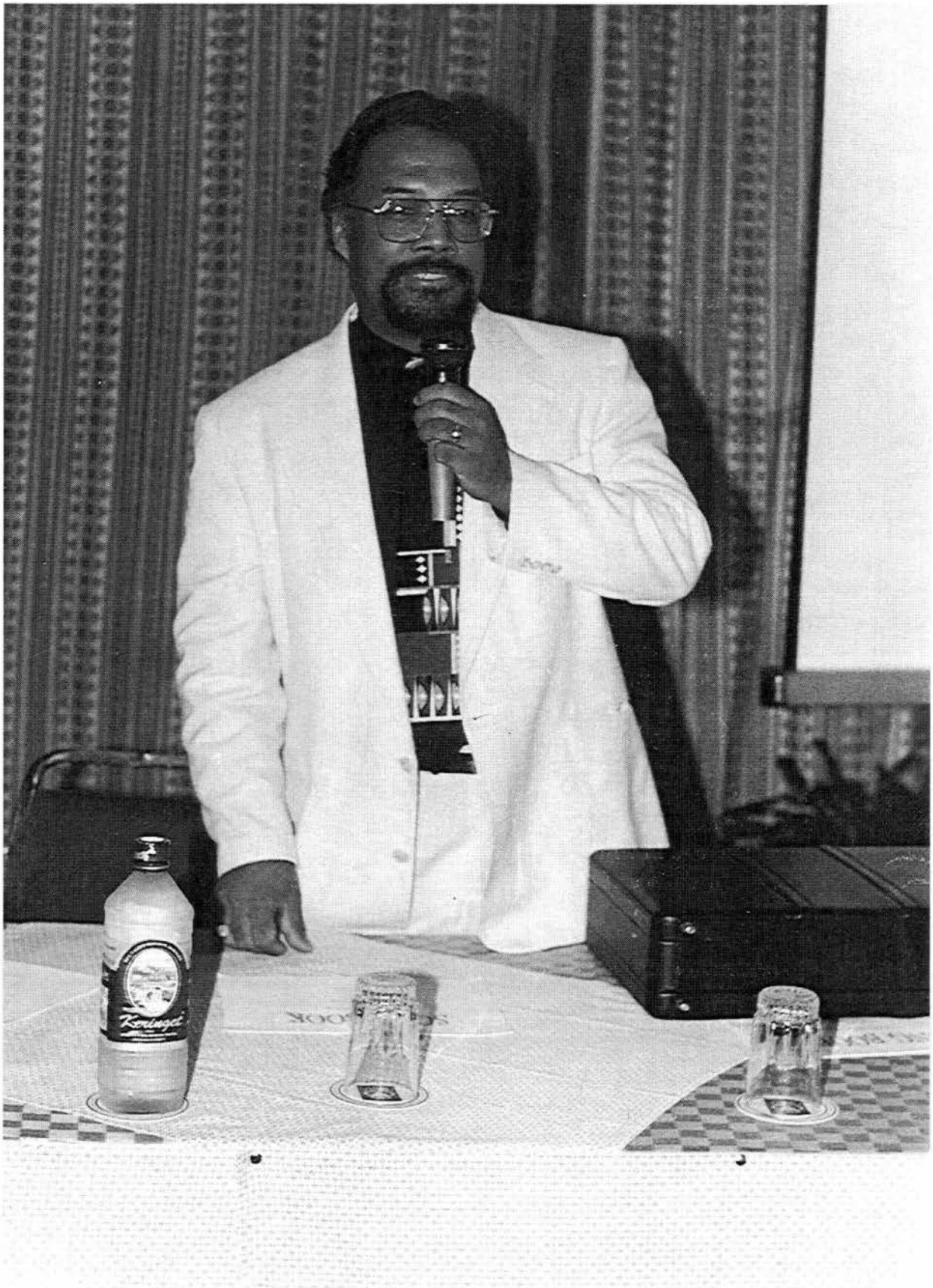
The *Findings and Recommendations* of the Consultation have already inspired and informed many of the DMD global and regional programmes. It is our sincere hope that the contents of this report may also prove useful to mission partners (member churches, mission departments/ societies, related agencies) in their planning for and design of mission activities.

We should like to express our sincere gratitude to the Planning Team which accompanied DMD staff in the realization of this consultation from start to finish. We should also like to express our deep appreciation to all the resource persons for their inspiring and thought provoking presentations and to Bishop Gideon Chang for his able chairing of the consultation.

Péri Rasolondraibe
Director LWF/DMD

LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission
October 25 to 29, 1998, Nairobi, Kenya

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Péri RASOLONDRAIBE

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, once again, to this Consultation on Churches in Mission, with the theme: ***Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission.*** The consultation, sponsored by the LWF Department for Mission and Development (DMD), was planned by an interdepartmental team with initial direction from a Planning Committee representing member churches.

As introductory remarks, I have only three comments, responding to the questions: Why?, What?, How?

1. Why are we here?

LWF Council Meeting in Kristiansand, Norway, 1993

At the Council meeting in Kristiansand, Norway, June 1993, the former DMD Director, underlined in his report the need to lift up missiological issues for discussion within the LWF constituency. While there was no doubt that the document, *Together in God's Mission: an LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission*, developed by the former Commission on Church Cooperation at the request of the LWF's Seventh Assembly, had proved a useful tool, there was a need to continue theological reflection on mission.

At the same meeting, the former General Secretary, in his address, called for closer cooperation between mission organizations in the north and the LWF in terms of information sharing and practical cooperation, and in terms of the contribution such organizations might make to the discussion of the role and place of mission and missiological issues in the LWF and its member churches.

Consultation with Mission Agencies, Geneva, Switzerland, 1994

The Program Committee for Mission and Development/Council affirmed the above and asked staff to specify ways to enhance cooperation between such organizations and the LWF. In response, DMD convened a meeting in April 1994 in Geneva with 25 representatives of mission organizations. The participants recommended that the process of reflection on mission and evangelism, *aiming to strengthen the missionary nature of the church*, be continued and urged the LWF to initiate a participatory study process on present missiological issues, to provide

regular fora for reflection on themes arising from mission practices, assuring participation from other continents and the ecumenical network, and to provide and develop new models for effective and increased information sharing and communication. At its meeting in 1994, the Council asked staff to proceed with the implementation of the understandings reached at the meeting in consultation with mission agencies, development agencies and member churches.

In September 1996, at its meeting in Geneva, the Council approved a DMD request to hold a consultation with representatives of LWF member churches, mission societies and related agencies in Nairobi, Kenya from October 25 to 29, 1998. In April 1997, a planning committee composed of seven people from Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe, highly engaged in the different facets of the mission of the church, met in Geneva to discuss the content and format of this consultation. They chose the theme: *Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission.*

LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong, 1997

Then came the LWF's Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong in July 1997. The Assembly's emphasis on mission provides greater impetus for this Consultation. Among other important matters, the delegates to the Assembly called on the churches to commit themselves to "*strengthen our missiological and missionary efforts, to deepen our understanding of the gospel, and to explore news ways of sharing God's love with people who do not yet or no longer know Christ as their Lord and Savior.*" (Report, P. 53)

When reviewing the mandate, message and decisions from the Ninth Assembly, the Council, which met immediately after the Assembly, placed emphasis on the need

1. *to affirm Mission and Evangelism as central to the task of the Federation and the member churches, and to ensure that the relevant departments coordinate their work on this emphasis;*

2. *to ensure that high priority be given to inspiring and strengthening member churches for authentic and culture-sensitive witnessing to Christ in an increasingly plural and multi-religious world;*

3. *to call member churches to fresh engagement in common witness in each local place and all places, and to give attention to how the ecumenical task of realizing unity among churches might find expression in mission and evangelism;*

4. *to ensure that the exchange of experiences on mission praxis between the member churches be taken seriously.*

It is pleasing to note that the different concerns contained in these resolutions approved by Council were already anticipated by our planning committee and incorporated in the three tracks, namely, Theological Study on Mission, Partnership in Mission and New Approaches to Mission.

2. What are we to do?

We are to do better than aiming at producing another consultation report or another set of mission statements.

What we are to do, according to the Commitments and Resolutions of the Hong Kong Assembly, is to find ways **to strengthen member churches' missiological and missionary efforts.** In the words of the Resolutions, we will search for ways of "*inspiring and strengthening member churches for authentic and culture-sensitive witnessing to Christ in an increasingly plural and multi-religious world*". We cannot achieve everything at this consultation, but we can set the process in motion.

For this to happen, we have set two specific objectives for this consultation.

First, to contribute to the re-writing of the LWF's document on mission, *Together in God's Mission: an LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission*, published in 1988 but written already in 1982. The document has served the churches well, but as we move into the new millennium and face new challenges and opportunities, as we gain new understandings of mission, and as we learn from our experiences in partnership and new approaches to witness in word and deed, we need to up-date it. Our reflection and discussions in the plenary sessions and in the different tracks will contribute towards the re-writing of the mission document. A team of mission specialists and church leaders will be established to plan, study and oversee the actual writing of the new mission document, but work at this consultation will contribute fundamentally to that effort. Already this afternoon, the tone will be set by a panel discussion on "Expanding the Vision of the Document".

Second, parallel to our reflection on and discussion of the various topics will be consideration of and planning for follow-up. Proposals are to be presented to the LWF for global or regional programmes that will help strengthen the missional study and practice of member churches and their agencies.

Keeping these two specific objectives in mind, we will reflect together and aim at deepening our understanding of mission (Track I), discuss, challenge and reshape our understanding and practice of partnership (Track II), and explore together new ways of sharing God's love with all people (Track III).

Still bearing these two objectives in mind, we will identify and highlight three significant areas of concern:

1) We will harvest emerging understanding or descriptions of mission, partnership and approaches to mission;

2) we will identify mission related themes and areas needing further in-depth study and/or research;

3) We will propose to the LWF different programmatic activities that will help strengthen the missional study and practice of member churches and their agencies.

3. How are we to do it?

Reflection and discussion

In the plenary and the three tracks, we will reflect upon and discuss the designated topics keeping in mind

- the theme of the consultation: "Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission",
- the two specific objectives based on the Assembly commitment: "to strengthen the missional study and practice of member churches",
- the three areas of concern.

Harvesting the gifts

As papers are presented and topics discussed, some of us will be responsible for harvesting the shared ideas. In each track, we will have the following enablers (which is also true of the plenary sessions):

- the chair will be responsible for the smooth running of the Plenary or the Track sessions;
- the recorder will be responsible for the proceedings of the track or plenary. This is very important as setting the background of our final proposals;
- the harvest presenter will be responsible for gleaning the important issues and suggestions discussed in the Track and for reporting to the plenary during "harvest time";
- the Tracker is an LWF staff member who will focus on identifying relevant discussion items responding to the three processes outlined earlier.

These four enablers will form the "track team" responsible for writing a succinct report on the findings of the track following the three areas of concern mentioned above. Each team may gather at the end of each day or at the end of the second day to work on its report.

The drafting committee

We have a drafting committee composed of:

- a chair, two members of the steering committee, two members of each track team and a staff facilitator.

The task of the drafting committee is:

- to address a message to the member churches with regard to our being "together in God's mission" as a communion of churches and as we enter the third millennium;
- to compile and organize into one document the findings of the tracks and the opening plenary session;
- to draft proposals for global or regional programme activities that would strengthen the missional study and practice of the member churches and their agencies.

Our participation in the final draft

- We will have a chance to hear the draft and make our proposals;
- we will have a follow-up team, to be designated later, to make sure that all suggestions are incorporated in the final draft and to help the LWF secretariat plan for follow-up.

Finally, aware of the fact that some of you will have to leave before the closing of the consultation, I should like, at this point, to express words of appreciation and sincere gratitude to:

- the keynote speakers and the presenters for the energy and time you have offered the communion, not only in preparing your presentations, but also in coming to Nairobi;

- to all participants, from churches and mission departments/societies and related agencies, for making the time to share your wisdom with the whole communion;

- to our ecumenical guests and participants for your contribution in understanding better our common task of witnessing to Jesus Christ.

Most of you, I assume, have participated in consultations before, and know that the implementation and outcome do not always conform to plans and expectations. We come from 39 different countries all over the world, with different cultural backgrounds, different ways of doing things, different expectations, different perspectives, but we are all called to find ways to "strengthen the missional study and practice of member churches".

LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission
October 25 to 29, 1998, Nairobi, Kenya
Introductory Remarks - Péri Rasolondraibe

I wish all of you a challenging and satisfying consultation and an opportunity for each to share your spiritual gifts with the whole communion.

Before I finish, I should like to introduce our enablers:

Steering committee:

Bishop Gideon Chang, Lutheran Church in Malaysia, has graciously accepted to serve as the chair of our plenary sessions.
The Rev. Bonnie Jensen, Director of the Division for Global Mission, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Rev. Hannes Gännsbauer, LWF National Committee in Germany
The Rev. Rui Bernhard, Mission Department, Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil
Dr. Risto Ahonen, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission
The Rev. Shadrack Manyiewa, Secretary for Mission, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (unable to attend due to sickness)

Worship life

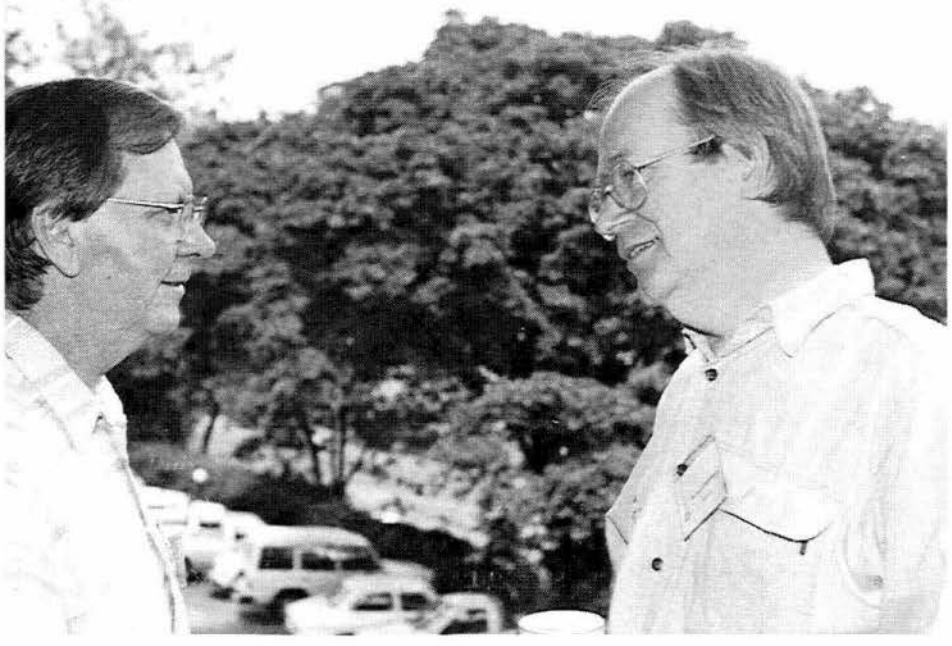
The Rev. and Mrs. James Capers, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will lead us in the evening "Mission Spirituality". Four participants have been invited to lead us in the morning devotions, one already this morning, the Rev. Lucretia van Ommeren from Suriname. The others are, Mr. Sakey Ronuc, Papua New Guinea, the Rev. Annette Goll-Reutenauer, France, and the Rev. Sebataolo Loate, South Africa.

Logistics and financial matters

Dr. Colette Bouka-Coula will coordinate.

I wish you a successful and blessed consultation.

FINDINGS



Message

from the LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the participants in the Lutheran World Federation Global Consultation on the Churches in Mission. In our gathering in Nairobi, Kenya (Africa), under the theme, ***"Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission,"*** we have experienced the surprise and joy of a renewed call to partnership in God's mission. We have been encouraged and strengthened for mission, by the sharing of experiences, prayer, conversation and the diversity of gifts which God has given. Our time in worship community has uplifted us with a mission spirituality. We now desire to share the gifts and insights of this gathered community with you, so that we may be strengthened for God's mission together. (A report will be produced later with proceedings and recommendations from the consultation.)

The LWF Ninth Assembly in Hong Kong in 1997 emphasized mission and called on the member churches to "strengthen our missiological and missionary efforts, to deepen our understanding of the gospel, and to explore new ways of sharing God's love with people who do not yet or no longer know Christ as their Lord and Savior" (Hong Kong Report, page 53). This global consultation provided the first opportunity since the Assembly for LWF member churches, mission societies and related agencies to meet together and recommit ourselves to being Christ's "witnesses ...to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:08). The consultation was conducted in the following three tracks: Theological Study in Mission, Partnership in Mission and New Approaches in Mission.

We affirm that the mission of God is rooted in God's love and concern for humanity and for all creation. We live in many countries and contexts of personal, family, cultural and societal diversity. This diversity is God's gift for which we are thankful. The gospel of Jesus Christ speaks within and from our communities. We encourage congregations to renew, train and equip each baptized Christian to be a witness to Jesus Christ and, therefore, a missionary empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. As congregations we are called to be communities of witnessing, caring and healing, which are empowered by God's Word and strengthened by the means of grace. This missionary vocation implies listening to needs, recognizing spiritual and material gifts, and responding with witness and ministry that is holistic.

Within this consultation we experienced that holistic ministry is understood and affirmed as part of the Lutheran identity within God's mission - an expression of the Lutheran communion within God's worldwide *communio*. Proclamation, advocacy and service constitute this vision of holistic ministry, which continues to be enriched by voices from our diverse and particular contexts with challenges of evangelization and reconciliation, justice and diakonia. We also recognized that we need to strengthen Lutheran unity and ecumenical partnership in mission.

In relation to people of diverse faiths, dialogue and cooperation are also elements of God's mission. Christ in our midst calls us to mission within our varied communities and contexts, not for the sake of the church, but for the sake of God's mission.

The churches, and the communities where they serve, confront many harsh realities, burdens and obstacles in many regions of the world. Yet the church in many places is vibrant, confident and innovative. We listened and were enriched by the multiplicity of experiences and the renewed and emerging models for mission within our worldwide communion. The consultation called for continuing missiological study that affirms the gifts of churches in diverse contexts, and that broadens such studies to include emerging needs and experiences, such as globalization, urbanization, violence and poverty. Missiology studies should include and further explore concepts such as *missio dei*, transformation, and diakonia.

The consultation also affirmed the significant role of the Lutheran World Federation in continuing to develop models and expressions of multilateral partnerships in mission. As a worldwide Lutheran communion, there is an emerging need for coordination and facilitation of expanding networks of bilateral relationships. Within the context of our Lutheran communion, there is need for embodiment of principles and practices of holistic mission within our partnership relationships. Structures, mutual accountability and transparency, planning, decision making and the sharing of resources - human, material and financial - must all become part of the renewal of inclusive relationships for partnership together in God's mission.

In this consultation we recognize the urgent need for the gospel in today's world, and we recommit ourselves to the prophetic task which is part of our participation in God's mission. Especially within the community of the church, we are called to self-reflection and recommitment to God's mission, so that together we may become transforming communities of God's people. This affirmation echoes the commitments of the Hong Kong Assembly, that within the unity of the worldwide Lutheran communion we have an ecumenical commitment that seeks the renewed vitality of faithful partnership in God's mission into the third millennium.

October 29, 1998
Nairobi, Kenya

Findings and Recommendations

Introduction

From October 25 to 29, 1998, a Consultation on Churches in Mission was sponsored by the LWF's Department for Mission and Development (DMD) in Nairobi, Kenya, in line with its mandate to "carry out programs with LWF member churches in respect to their task of mission and evangelism within the many contexts in which the churches are present" (DMD Terms of Reference). About 80 representatives of LWF member churches, mission societies/ departments and related agencies came together to reflect upon and discuss missiological issues and missional practices under the theme: *Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission.*

The aim of the consultation was to spearhead discussions on relevant missiological issues and practices, serving as a spring-board for different follow-up programs. It was not expected that it would provide ready answers to complex missiological problems and challenges or definitive directions to missional inquiries. The primary intention was to promote a participatory engagement in the process of rethinking and reformulating the mission task of the church, cognizant of the fact that the centre of gravity of Christianity has now moved to the South.

Reflections and discussions on the theme took place in plenary sessions, where keynote addresses were delivered, and in three tracks, set up to reflect on the following missiological concerns: *Theological Study on Mission, Partnership in Mission* and *New Approaches in Mission.* Various issue-oriented presentations were made during the track sessions. A summary of the reflections and findings of each track was shared daily during a "harvest time" in plenary, thus enabling the participants to discuss the final findings at the end of the consultation.

Participants experienced the enriching gift of diversity, as they became aware that there were different understandings, perceptions and practices of mission among the churches world-wide. While realizing the complexity of and difficulties with mission partnership relations, be they bilateral, interregional or multilateral, they also underlined the necessity for and the blessings of cooperation in being together in God's mission. The participants also felt that renewed and emerging models of missional practices were indicative of vibrant churches as they endeavoured to transform challenging world situations into opportunities for rethinking and reformulating the mission task of the church.

Theological Study on Mission

From theological reflections and discussions on *Theology, Globalization/Contextualization, Communion,* and *Service* in relation to *mission* emerged the following findings and recommendations:

Findings

1. Mission encompasses proclamation, service and advocacy for justice. Mission as **proclamation** is an attempt by every Christian to tell and interpret the gospel story in his/her context as a way to discover God's saving action and meaningful presence in the world. Mission as **service** highlights the diaconal dimension of a faith active in love, working for the empowerment and liberation of those in need. Mission as **advocacy for justice** denotes the church's praxis in the public arena as affirmation and reaffirmation of the dignity of human life, both as individual and as community, as well as a widened sense of justice, encompassing the economic, social and ecological spheres. Moreover, mission includes dialogue with people of diverse faiths, not seeking to impose Christian visions and hopes on other religions, but sharing mutually religious understandings and concerns alongside each other.

2. The concept of "transformation" is emerging as an important mission imperative as the church, in every context, is called to be a transforming community of God's people. Transformation happens on the personal, ecclesial and societal levels. It has christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological bases. Since the church is not the only agent of transformation in society, the concept offers the possibility for inter-disciplinary reflection and cooperation.

3. There is an awareness of the significance of the fact that "incarnation of the Gospel" takes place in many contexts. Mission can no longer be defined in one universal formula, but must be addressed in context. The contextualization of the Word within, and also flowing from, the life of communities, has different meanings, expressions and experiences in different cultures and life situations.

4. *Missio Dei* (the mission of God), as the orienting theological principle for mission, has many different understandings and implications. Especially in the context of religious pluralism, *Missio Dei* cannot simply be equated with the mission of the church.

5. Theology is an indispensable tool for the well-being of church and society. Therefore, theology must strengthen the mission understanding and practice of the church and, in this sense, be accountable to the mission of the church.

6. There is an emerging awareness that existing church structures influence the manner in which the church community undertakes mission. Thus, further reflection on ecclesiological conditions and their implications for mission is deemed necessary.

Recommendations

That the Department for Mission and Development

1. plan and facilitate processes leading to a revision of the LWF Document, *Together in God's Mission,* (November 1988), taking into account relevant missiological and methodological issues recommended by this consultation;

2. develop a companion document to assist churches in strengthening mission at the congregational level, aiming to be inspirational and motivating, and using simple language.

That the Department for Mission and Development, in cooperation with other relevant departments,

3. facilitate processes for further study of the concepts of ***Missio Dei*** (mission of God) in view if the reality of religious plurality, **transformation** as a mission imperative, **contextual theology**, including the dialectical tension between the catholicity of the gospel and the validation of people's emergent theologies and the relation between doctrine and experience, and the meaning and implications of **post-modernity** and **post-Christendom** for mission;

4. assist churches in discussing issues related to **mission as service (diakonia)**, including the relevance and usefulness of the term "development" in relation to mission, the ecclesiological dimensions of service and diakonia in the LWF, and including witness through service on the level of the congregation;

5. facilitate an exploration of the creative tension between proclamation (i.e. evangelistic witness) and service (diakonia) within the framework of a holistic mission, and endeavour to foster the inter-relation between evangelization and development;

6. facilitate studies and a series of consultations on **globalization issues** with emphasis on global challenges (e.g. poverty, violence, ecology, religions) and mission responses (e.g. justice, reconciliation, partnership, mutual respect) in order to assist and equip member churches to address the dimensions and implications of globalization, helping them to discern spirits and to have a proactive role in sustaining healthy community and church life;

That the Departments for Mission and Development and Theology and Studies

7. facilitate study on **ecclesiology and mission** with emphasis on the understanding of *koinonia* (communion) and mission, the ecumenical dimension of missiological study and practice, including the relationships between "establishing and maintaining Lutheran identity" and "seeking to cooperate ecumenically" in mission endeavours;

8. continue to explore the theological significance and experience of **dialogue with people of diverse faiths** as an appropriate and new approach to mission.

PARTNERSHIPS IN MISSION

From reflections and discussions on the missional issues of *missionaries of today, accompaniment in mission, being in partnership* and *mission in context* emerged the following findings and recommendations:

Findings

1. There is a growing desire expressed by partners in mission to overcome mission hierarchies with new forms of partnership in which power is shared equally by all partners. As understanding of power is shifted from a static one, in which a limited amount of power is controlled by a few, to a dynamic understanding, in which power expands as participation is widened, there can be no more division into mission "objects" and mission "subjects". All partners are subjects, taking initiatives in their own contexts, but participating in joint endeavours with equal sharing in decision-making and the application of resources (financial and personnel).

2. Forms and patterns of mission partner relationships have been developing from bilateral to multilateral, from hierarchical to more participatory, and from exclusively Lutheran to include ecumenical and interfaith relationships. In addition to bilateral relationships, which have generally been north-south, there are now south-south relationships, as well as south-north and east-west. Northern networks in mission continue to develop, while southern networks are beginning to emerge.

3. The emerging new understandings of "missionary" and "missionary exchange" are made more complex with the expansion of bilateral partnerships and the multiplicity of new partners (e.g. in eastern Europe). There is an awareness that bilateral relationships can be limiting with a reduced sense of the wider communion. With new partners, there is need for a sense of spiritual compatibility in order to work well together.

Recommendations

That the Lutheran World Federation

1. assist mission partners in clarifying and developing expectations and standards for transparency in mission partner relationships, involving both donors and recipients (as currently defined); that the diversity of cultural values, meanings and practices be considered;

2. facilitate discussion and study of the effects and implications of reduced funding on mission partner relationships, and address the matter of stewardship of resources, including financial sustainability and support for mission.

That the Department for Mission and Development, in cooperation with other relevant departments,

3. assist mission partners (churches, mission societies and related agencies) in addressing issues of dependency and paternalism, by strengthening training programs for local persons for the sustainability of the mission task; that such assistance and training focus on mutuality and interdependence which is called forth within "the body of Christ."

That the Department for Mission and Development

4. assist mission partners in exploring the full range of expectations and experiences associated with the role of "international missionaries" and "expatriate missionaries", and that statements of common understandings and expectations for the role and function of such missionaries be developed;

5. facilitate discussion and study to assist mission partners in facing new contexts for mission when partners may have different perspectives on issues (e.g. poverty, gender, advocacy, sexuality); and that assistance be provided to deal constructively with controversy within mission relationships;

6. facilitate consultation and study regarding issues of competition and cooperation relating to various mission groups or partners (ecumenical, interfaith and secular) especially in areas of service and development;

7. develop programs of LWF regional expression to assist mission partners in addressing mission opportunities, and encourage and assist mission partners to utilize more effectively regional expressions of Lutheran Communion (e.g. Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa) for joint mission activities.

APPROACHES TO MISSION

From reflections and discussions on *four case studies on different creative approaches to mission and evangelism, church renewal and mission,* and *priority in mission,* the following findings and recommendations emerged:

Findings

1. The rich histories and diversity of LWF member churches are reflected in the approaches taken in mission. Many models have been utilized effectively, depending on circumstances and context. Holistic ministry, involving proclamation, advocacy and service, has been a common practice which is understood and affirmed as part of the Lutheran identity within God's mission.

2. The wide range of approaches to mission, spiritual growth and renewal is deserving of respect and an open attitude of engagement. Approaches such as the awakening movement, charismatic communities, base communities, and mega churches grow out of different contexts which help to shape the approaches used. Luther's Small Catechism can serve as an ongoing reference and basis for theological reflection on approaches to mission.

3. There is a need for commitment to seek ways of sharing continuously our experiences in mission. Learning more about individual approaches as spiritually renewed agents of mission enables us to explore methods of collectively engaging in mission.

4. There is a growing emphasis on the awareness that each baptized Christian is called to be a witness to Jesus Christ and, therefore, to be a missionary. Congregations have a calling and responsibility to renew, train and equip laity to be agents in mission (i.e. missionaries).

5. Although each member church attempts to identify obstacles to and opportunities for mission and ministry within its own context, resulting in strategies for mission, there is a need to take account of the experiences of other churches within the Lutheran communion and wider ecumenical community (e.g. relating to issues of urbanization and communication for evangelism).

6. A community-based approach to mission places particular attention on the context within which a community lives. It is committed to reflecting both the needs and the gifts of the community, and endeavours to discern the reality of the gospel message growing within and out of the context of the community.

Recommendations

That the Department for Mission and Development

1. review and expand its "Questionnaire on Mission" to request information about domestic mission activities in order for all LWF member churches to participate in the survey; and publish a summary and analysis of survey responses;

2. organise a consultation on the renewal movements in north and south within the LWF member churches, taking into account the need to share experiences of the charismatic movement, the awakening movement, and phenomena such as mega churches;

3. take a more active role in facilitating dialogue and sharing of mission experiences within the LWF communion of churches; consult with member churches to identify new challenges and opportunities for mission, especially related to unreached areas and communities; and that new methods of mission consider the use of television, radio, the Internet and emerging communication technologies;

4. encourage and equip member churches for the practice of a holistic approach to mission in which emphasis is given to healing and caring ministry as a transforming response to the spiritual, physical and material needs of the community; and assist member churches as they develop motivation strategies for mission, based upon a holistic approach;

5. assist the European member churches in addressing the mission challenges in Europe;

6. continue to develop and prioritize specific programs on mission in urban and industrialized environments.

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

Into the Third Millennium: Together in God's Mission

Eila Helander

We live in a world which, more than ever before, can be truly regarded as *one* world. Advanced technical developments in communication mean that what happens in one corner of the world is soon known the world over. Even if news does not immediately reach people in remote areas, sooner or later and in one way or another they feel the consequences of distant events.

At the same time, we live in a divided world. Nations are ranked according to a host of political, economic and religious criteria in an attempt to comprehend our diverse world and give direction to plans and activities. For the Christian church with a mission in the world, it is crucially important to decide its own viewpoint, draw conclusions and act appropriately on its observations.

Human Development

The United Nations recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights. Even though UN member states have committed themselves to work towards a fairer and more just world for humankind, they are far from their set targets. We continue to live in a world where inequalities are steadily increasing. In September 1998 the United Nations Development Programme issued its report,[1] in which countries are ranked according to the Human Development Index (HDI).[2] The UNDP report concentrated on consumption. Compared with 1975, consumption has doubled. Inequalities in consumption are stark. Globally, the 20 per cent of the world's people in the highest-income countries account for 86 per cent of total private consumption expenditure. The poorest fifth has to be satisfied with 1.3 per cent. Long, healthy life and access to education are beyond the reach of millions of people.[3] Developing countries are caught in a vicious economic circle. Their enormous debts and the interest they have to pay mean that they have less and less chance of developing basic social infrastructure such as health care, education and so on.

According to the UNDP report the gap between rich and poor has grown within rich countries too. The Human Poverty Index (HPI-2)[4] indicates that 7–17 per cent of the population in industrialized nations are poor. In these countries poverty is lowest in Sweden (7 per cent). The USA, with the highest per capita income measured in purchasing power parity (PPP), also has the highest human poverty (16.5 per cent). HPI-2 shows that insufficient education and human

deprivation are not just the lot of the poor in developing countries. Over 100 million people in the industrialized nations share the same fate. Over 100 million people are homeless and about 37 million people are unemployed; many of them have become socially marginalized.

Politics and Economics

As a result of the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the bipolarity between the superpowers has disappeared. This has had many consequences for the whole world. For example, many of the developing countries have lost their political importance for the USA, since there is no longer any need for the US to forge alliances in different parts of the world against the communist enemy. Regionalism, as in the formation of the European Union, has now become a political force to be reckoned with.

At the same time, while nations are striving towards a more united world, local wars and unrest have typified the 1990s. News about wars reminds us daily that we live in a world divided by bitter enmities. In Europe, wars and unrest in the Balkans never seem to cease. Wars continue to flare up in different parts of the African continent. Many Asian countries face political upheaval, and there have been major protests in some Latin American countries. Modern media sees to it that pictures of wars, the dying and homeless, people in anguish and in sorrow, are brought daily into our homes.

The economic situation does not look any better. Not only is there an unequal distribution of wealth between nations. The world faces its most serious economic problems in 50 years, the effects of which will be felt in rich and poor nations. Some countries have in the past few years witnessed steady economic growth which has led people to believe that it will continue. However, capitalism confronts its first major crisis since the fall of socialism. The continuous opening up of markets and the globalization of the economy have reached a point where it is necessary for the economic and political leaders of the world to pause, take stock and plan the way ahead carefully. The worldwide economic assessments in the annual report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) are not encouraging. The effects of the economic crises in Asia and Russia are already being felt in different parts of the world. These crises are further increasing the gap between the rich North and the poor South. UNCTAD predicts that if mistakes continue, the whole world will be threatened by a lengthy and deep economic depression.[5]

Religion

When we look at the religious map of the world, only one third (33.2 per cent) of the world's population are Christians.[6] Almost two thirds of these (60 per cent) are in the southern hemisphere where the church is growing rapidly. The fall of the communist regimes has brought about religious change in Europe. New religious freedom has given more opportunities to Christians in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, changes in legislation

have also meant that many countries have experienced an influx of a multitude of various Christian groups and religions. The result is in some places mass confusion, which may endanger the work of the Christian church since the situation has led to the tightening of government policies.

As far as Western countries are concerned, there is a marked decline in interest in the church and what it represents. However, at the same time, there is growing interest in religion. This confusing and complex state of affairs has led many to wonder if Western countries should still be regarded as Christian. In the West generally, major social, political and economic changes have had a tremendous impact on religion. Industrialization and urbanization have led to social fragmentation, a decline in community, an increase in bureaucracy and a form of consciousness associated with these changes.[7] As a result of modernization, churches have less social significance than they once had. Indeed, the churches themselves have not remained immune from the processes of secularization.[8]

Studies conducted throughout the Western world bear witness to the above. According to the Survey of Religious and Moral Pluralism in the Nordic countries in 1997,[9] religiosity in the Nordic countries is only partially linked with Christianity, even though a majority of their populations are members of the Lutheran churches. This is illustrated by the following two examples: people's concept of God (table 1) and how frequently they attend Sunday services (table 2).

Table 1 Concept of God in the Nordic countries (%)

Concept of God	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	Average Total
Personal God	20	39	28	18	25
Spirit of life force	21	14	16	20	18
God inside each person	35	28	25	36	32
Do not believe	13	10	16	12	12
Do not know what to believe	10	8	16	15	12

Table 1 indicates that the traditional Christian teaching of a personal God is not the most common concept of God among Nordic people. Even though the percentage of those who believe in God is relatively high, the equivalent percentage is much higher in other parts of the world. According to the latest World Values Study,[10] in South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Venezuela and the Philippines, for example, the figure can be as high as 99 per cent!

Table 2 Service attendance in the Nordic countries (%)

Service Attendance	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	Average Total
Monthly	9	13	10	9	10
Sometimes in a year	23	29	23	22	24
Occasionally	35	39	34	38	37
Never	34	19	33	32	30

Table 2 shows that Nordic people are not frequent churchgoers. Church is visited occasionally, often during Christmas and Easter or on family occasions. It is important to note that one third of the population never attends Sunday services. At the same time, the majority of the population are members of the Lutheran church. For example, in Finland the figure is 85 per cent. The high percentage of church membership still indicates interest in religion. It can be argued that low church attendance does not so much indicate a *lack* of religiosity as a change in the *form* of religiosity.

The same kind of decline in church attendance can be detected in the USA. Based on opinion polls, people's church attendance was thought generally to be high. However, recent studies based on actual observations at Sunday services have cast doubt on this; indeed, the figure is shown to be considerably lower. In other words, people tend to answer in the way they think that they should behave as good Americans, rather than how they actually behave.[11]

Modernization has generated secularization. However, it is important to realize that the secularization of the Western world does not mean that it is becoming non-religious. It has been argued that secularization generates countervailing processes. These can take the form of revival – as when protest groups aim to restore a vigorous other-worldliness to conventional faith – or new religious traditions.[12] At present there are two contradictory movements in religion: the quest for a New Age type of spirituality and the demand to rehabilitate tradition in mainstream religions which has manifested itself in the form of fundamentalism.[13] These developments can be observed in different parts of Europe and North America.

People are interested in religion, but their religiosity is diffused. The decline in the major religious traditions leaves people free to experiment in the religious market-place, where religious knowledge, experiences and activities are offered from both within the Christian tradition and from outside it. People pick and choose religious material from culturally and confessionally diversified sources according to their needs. Such behaviour has been regarded as a typical result of following the postmodern values of novelty, rapid change, individual enjoyment and consumer choice.[14]

The fundamentalist approach seems to appeal to those for whom religious pluralism has brought agonies of choice. It clearly stipulates what is right and wrong and thus reduces the risk in individual decision-making. Scholars of religion have perceived fundamentalism as a totalitarian or proto-totalitarian solution for those for whom the individual freedom brought about by postmodern, market-led consumer society is excessive and unbearable.[15]

Societies in Europe, especially in big cities, are becoming multi-religious and multicultural. Many of the growing new religious movements have their roots in eastern religions. There is a marked interest also in the eastern religions themselves, for example in Tibetan Buddhism. With the immigration of migrant workers, Islam has come to be a religious force to be reckoned with in Western Europe. Since the 1950s Muslims from Turkey, ex-Yugoslavia, the Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian peninsula have migrated to Europe. The Islam of Europe is by no means homogeneous; both Sunnis and Shias are represented. There are now about 9 million Muslims and close to 3,000 mosques in Western Europe. The number of Muslims is growing steadily, mainly due to migration. For Muslims, Europe is an Islamic continent. European Muslims are not necessarily more liberal than their fellow believers in the old Islamic countries. European mosques follow closely the developments that take place in the Islamic centres of the Near East. The third generation of migrants speaks fluent French, German, English or Swedish. For them the question of one's cultural and religious identity is a burning issue. Instead of integration into Western societies, many Muslims want not only to separate themselves from the cultural mainstream but also to offer Islam as an alternative solution to the social ills of society. In some European countries Muslim parents have begun to request Islamic teaching in schools and there have also been efforts to open Islamic schools.

Globalization and Religion

We live at a time when nations have become more globally interactive and interdependent than ever before. This technologically led interdependence has no parallel in human history. Globalization is a force the church has to recognize and it must act accordingly if it is going to be true to its calling.

Globalization is a direct consequence of modernization and can be described as economic interdependence at a global level. It manifests itself in the increasing movement of people, goods, services and capital across boundaries. It can be seen also in the faster and greater transfer of technology from one country to another and from one region to another. It can be defined as structural change in economic, political and social actions moving towards transnational and regional forms of the use of power, and international relations. Globalization is influenced above all by technological development and liberalization of the economy. The development of technology makes globalization possible and the liberalization of the economy realizes it. Globalization is a long, continuous process which touches in one way or another all parts of the world.[16]

It is important to realize that globalization has not only economic and political consequences, but also cultural consequences. It has created a new kind of world in which economic, political and cultural forces have far-reaching consequences for the Christian church.

One typical characteristic of globalization is that democratic values and an appreciation of economic growth have spread to different parts of the world. However, the very system globalization has created means that goals and values such as equality cannot be realized everywhere. Instead, the global system is creating vast inequalities, the devastating effects of which are already felt in some countries. The world will become more and more divided into core regions which will benefit from the system and marginalized areas that will benefit little, if at all. One central problem will be linked with the relativization of personal and group identities. Striving for socio-cultural particularism does not mean striving solely for and maintaining a particular cultural identity. It is also about power and competition in relation to the benefits of the global society. Globalization creates a sensitive situation prone to various social and political movements. Such movements will aim especially at achieving unrealized values and goals. Religion has functioned and will function increasingly as a cultural resource for such movements.[17]

The development of modern sciences such as genetic engineering has meant that people have become insecure. Pollution and various other ecological problems are now seen as the results of the irresponsible use of advanced technology and have become global problems. Science is viewed less positively and as having less of a saving role in the world. People have come to believe that scientific knowledge can indeed be used for the benefit of humankind, but also to destroy human life. Ethical questions in science have in recent years become important issues, for example when designing European science policies. The role of religion has become more visible in this respect.

Which Way in God's Mission?

It is clear that we live in a confusing world of change. Change takes place rapidly and in ways which are very difficult to predict. It is precisely because of all this that we are living in a special time (*kairos*) for the church. From the inception of the church, its mission has been to proclaim Christ. This task has not changed. Faith is a living reality and it is the task of every Christian to witness Christ.

Our rapidly changing world challenges both the form and content of our Christian witness. Globalization will bring religion to the fore in new and unforeseen ways as a cultural resource which will shape people's values and direct their behaviour. Peter Beyer, a Canadian sociologist of religion, argues that in the globalized world, religion is likely to take one of two directions. It will either concentrate on ministering to private religious choices, or it will enter the public arena, especially politically. The latter direction can take two forms. The first of these is

ecumenical, which will look at the problems generated by globalization. In the second, religion takes a particularistic stance and fights for the cultural distinctiveness of one region 'through reappropriation of traditional religious antagonistic categories'.[18]

It is my argument that, from a theological viewpoint, ministering to private religious needs and entering the public arena are not alternatives for the Christian church. If it is to be true to its task and calling, it has to include both approaches in its ministry. The widening gap between people and nations presents an increasing challenge to Christian witness. Working towards a more just world for humankind has been part of Christian witness since the birth of the church. Caring for the poor, sick and marginalized, working towards better life conditions, providing education and fighting for equal rights cannot be excluded from Christian witness. This has to take place locally and internationally.

Due to local and global economic and political developments, a change in the focus of the church's work and mission orientation can be detected in the North. In many industrialized countries the growing numbers of the poor and marginalized are increasingly left to the care of churches and voluntary Christian organizations. Apart from such internal demands, the massive social problems and deprivations on Europe's doorstep, for example in Russia, have brought about a situation in which many people feel it is easier to work for and with those who are closer to home than to think about far-away countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America.

At the same time, it can be argued that due to increasing globalization it is likely that involvement in international diaconia will grow. In spite of political agreements between nations and the signing of various declarations about working for a better and more just world, states will not be able to fulfil their obligations in respect of these issues. Robert Schreiter argues that

> the empowerment of communities, from neighbourhood organizations to the NGO [non-governmental organization], has to continue to be on religion's agenda. With the decline of the state under global capitalism, the international character of Christianity can play an important role in mediating in ways that states are no longer able to do.[19]

We have a clear example of this with regard to the Jubilee of the church, marking the end of its second millennium. A movement which started in Britain and which has gathered support from churches in different parts of the world has called for the cancellation of the debts of the developing countries and for the employment of the funds saved in this way for development. I was told by Ms Halonen, the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs, that this suggestion was taken up with some ministers of foreign affairs by the UN General Secretary. Churches have a role to play at the public and global level. In the future there will be a need for more interaction between individual Christians and churches across national boundaries.

There are also needs that are not so plain to see. Western societies need now – more than ever before – the kind of Christian witness that expresses itself in spirituality. The growing religious market-place and the interest people show in it requires the church to conduct a critical self-examination. People have spiritual needs and they are seeking to satisfy them. It is precisely the mission of the Christian church to minister to such needs in a way that the gospel can be both understood and received. This requires an extensive study of the models of mission used by churches and mission organizations.

At the beginning of the third millennium and amid rapid change, our world needs an anchor of hope. There is a need for a worldview and a moral foundation that will provide an alternative to rampant egoism and hedonism. There is a need for ethical guidelines in business, science and technology. We need the Christian message to address the issue of what it is to be a true human being in relation to God, ourselves, other people and nature.

Human beings have not changed since Christianity began. We have the same need to hear the message of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of a new life. This message is important for a person regardless of their economic circumstances or where they live in the world. Spiritual needs do not diminish with the increase of wealth; rather, they arise from the very fact of being human. Churches have a message and a task which no educational or political organization can fulfil. If the church wants to move forward in God's mission, it has to respond to this challenge and to proclaim in word and deed the message of new life.

Rethinking Structures

Along with advanced technology, globalization has given churches better practical opportunities for working together than ever before. It is easy for us to see the challenges and opportunities our world offers to Christian witness. It is a mistake to think that the kind of mission structures, methods and activities we have been used to thus far will continue to be the best way forward. The crucial question is, how ready are we to meet these challenges in ways that serve our purpose?

Old attitudes and ways of thinking die slowly. I have argued elsewhere that one of the biggest structural problems in the Christian mission of the past few decades has been the inability of partners to change their old ways of working.[20] In spite of continuing deep socio-religious changes (which also affect churches), churches in the North have been slow to realize their need for help and to become receivers. When partners in the South have asked what they can do for them, too often many have been taken by surprise because they are unused to seeing themselves as receivers. Stiff competition in the business world has forced companies to conduct continuous self-assessments, to detect their weak points and needs, and to utilize their international networks in order to get the best expertise regardless of which corner of the world it comes from. Competition is also strong in the world of religion. The Christian church in the West cannot

simply rely on its deep cultural roots in these countries for its existence and growth. History is a merciless teacher. As this consultation takes place on the African continent, it is good to remind ourselves that the church was once strong in the northern part of Africa. Conversely, there are encouraging indications from Sweden and Germany that a new understanding of working together is beginning to form. I leave it to the churches in the South themselves to assess to what extent they have adopted the role of giver in relation to their partners in the North. Due to globalization we are fast moving towards a time when interdependence of various kinds will be more the norm than the exception if the church is going to be true to its calling.

This change in roles is slowly taking place at an informal level. Due to advances in technology and communication, individuals from different parts of the world with a common vision and goal in God's mission can get in touch with each other. The younger generation is setting us a good example. Without a doubt the number and variety of informal networks will increase and become part of future mission structures. Where these networks will find themselves in relation to churches and mission agencies and what role they will play in God's mission remains to be seen.

Another structural issue which cannot be avoided in a globalized world concerns supporting and – in some cases – 'hidden' partners. Many Western churches and mission agencies are co-operating with their governments in order to fund various development projects. This has resulted in a strange form of partnership in which a third partner may be the one who sets the rules for co-operation which the other partners have to follow. Apart from creating such ties of dependence, the sensitive global economic system is posing other unforeseen problems. How to devise such structures to enable churches involved in partnership to be true to their calling, and at the same time to minimize the risks of precarious economic circumstances, are issues which demand serious consideration.

Finally, churches in the North need to re-evaluate whether the old division between domestic 'normal church work' and foreign mission work is still valid. Mission work should not be the concern of the 'friends of mission' and a group of specialists alone. It is the task of every Christian. A person becomes a missionary at baptism, not by travelling to another country. Travelling and working in different parts of the world are no longer restricted to a select group of people. Every Christian is a witness to Christ wherever they are. In God's mission geographical boundaries lose their meaning. The 'ends of the earth' are found where there is need for the Good News, the gospel of life and hope. If we are willing to widen our understanding of who is a missionary, we will discover encouraging new openings and possibilities for Christian witness. Perhaps the bipolar notion of mission work, the sending and receiving, needs to be rethought altogether, regardless of whether the direction is North to South, South to North or South to South.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the third millennium the challenges which the rapidly changing world creates in unforeseen ways for God's mission are the church's opportunities. The various processes of globalization and advances in technology give the church a new setting and also the necessary means to operate within it. What the church needs is creativity and courage to move on into the unknown. Amid all its other important tasks the church of Christ has to remember that it has one such task which no other institution can perform: to proclaim the gospel and to make people Christ's disciples.

Notes

1 UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
2 The Human Development Index (HDI) is based on life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, combined first-, second- and third-level gross enrolment ration (education) and adjusted real GDP per capita.
3 In our world, 841 million people are suffering from malnutrition, 880 million are without access to health services, and 1.3 million go without clean drinking water. There are 885 million illiterate adults (age 15 and above) and 109 million (22 per cent of primary school age children) who are out of school.
4 HPI-2 is based on division of income, literacy, life expectancy and unemployment.
5 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *Trade and Development Report, 1998* (New York and Geneva: UN, 1998).
6 David B. Barrett and Toss M. Johnson, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, No. 1, January 1998.
7 Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 38–52.
8 Bruce (1996), 25–6.
9 Information on RAMP is based on results released in the 14th Nordic Conference in Sociology of Religion, Helsinki 13–16 August, 1998.
10 World Values Study 1995/96.
11 C. Kirk Hadaway, Penny L. Marler and Mark Chaves, 'What the polls don't show: a closer look at US church attendance', *American Sociological Review* 58 (1993): 741–51; 'Over-reporting church attendance in America: evidence that demands the same verdict', *American Sociological Review* 63 (1998): 741–52.
12 Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 2.
13 Kieran Flanagan, 'Introduction' in Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp (eds), *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 6.
14 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 278.
15 Zygmunt Bauman, 'Postmodern religion?' in Paul Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity*

and Postmodernity (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 72–5.

16 On globalization see, for example, Mike Featherstone (ed.), *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, Modernity* (London: Sage, 1990); Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992).

17 James A. Beckford, *Religion and Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), 170–1; Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1994), 97–108.

18 Beyer (1994), 95.

19 Robert J. Schreiter, 'Christianity in multi-religious societies: Research history and methodological questions'. NIME Research Course on the Theology of Religion. Stavanger, Norway, 10–14 August 1998, p. 18.

20 Eila Helander, 'A sociological approach to partnership relations within the context of mission', in Eila Helander and Wilson B. Niwagila, *Partnership and Power: A Quest for Reconstruction in Mission* (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission Erlangen, 1996).

Together In God's Mission: An Asian Perspective

Thu En Yu

Introduction

God's mission is not just 2,000 years old. According to the biblical record, it goes well beyond 3,000 years. The third millennium only applies to the history of Christianity.

God's mission and the church's mission have had their differences since the beginning of human history. The Israelites' understanding of God's mission in the Old Testament has been transformed to become the missiology of the New Testament church. The early church emphasized individual experience, and hence mission focused on an appeal for repentance, which was a process of preparation for entering the heavenly kingdom. This was a campaign that promoted individualism. By the fourth century, even though the church was overwhelmed by politics, its missiology did not in essence change much. This was the missiology of the first millennium.

If the church after the fourth century came under the immense influence of politics and society, then the fate of the medieval church was exactly the opposite. With the steady expansion and the subsequent concentration of power in the church, contemporary politics and society came under the control of the church. In the pursuit of power and interest, conflicts existed between the church and the state. Consequently, the theology of mission also manifested power, control and manipulation. Theology then revolved around tradition. This continued until the Reformation. Theology since then has been transformed to become centred on human beings. The Reformation brought about the disintegration of church unity. As reason and materialism presented increasingly formidable challenges, churches worldwide were forced to review their isolationist posture and adopted a sound approach of 'unity in diversity', or ecumenism. Ecumenical efforts led to an enormous expansion in the vision of mission. It resulted in exploration into new frontiers such as hunger, poverty, exploitation, human rights, environmental problems and the arms race.

The second millennium is rapidly becoming history. At the same time, the third millennium promises many surprises. It is timely for the church to do some serious soul-searching, so that Christians can march confidently into the future.

Asian Theologies of Mission

In the first few centuries of its existence the church distinguished between the spiritual and the material, separating the sacred and the secular into two distinct realms. It was assumed that the

tasks of the church concerned only the religious aspects of life, and not the social aspects. Social responsibilities belonged to the state. The great majority of the Asian churches have inherited this conservative evangelical tradition. Generally, Asian churches tend to consider the nature of the gospel purely personal and spiritual *vis-à-vis* the believer.

The coming of Christianity to China has not been welcomed by the intellectual community and the establishment. Over a few centuries, from the first contacts until the takeover by the Communist Party, the population of Protestants never exceeded 700,000. Chinese churches did not understand in depth the righteousness of God, nor were they concerned with the problems of humiliation and poverty suffered by those who were exploited and oppressed.

European and North American churches invested more people and other resources into Asia than anywhere else, especially in India and China. More missionaries were sent to these two countries than anywhere else. More mission funds were diverted to these countries, and more colleges, schools and hospitals were built there. Mission bodies were pouring in countless resources, yet in spite of the vast potential offered by these religious giants, Christianity remained a stranger.

Christianity has been in Malaysia for 487 years. Christians make up about 8 per cent of the total population. During the British colonial period, churches served more to segregate than to congregate. Churches were predominantly identified by race and economic status. They bypassed the poor, the Malays and tribal minorities.[1] As a result, after independence, the legacy of segregation continued to promote racial polarization and resulted in hostility against Christianity. Later, as more Christians participated in the process of nation-building, hostility gradually eased as racial barriers were broken down.

Churches during the colonial era lacked:

- indigenization;
- multi-racial sensitivity;
- ecumenicity.

Similar stories can be told elsewhere in other Asian countries. Parenthetically, Christianity has not been able to take root because it has long been regarded as the religion of the West.

In the sophisticated Asian fabric of religions, politics, cultures and history, Christianity has always been an outsider. In appearance and expression, as well as in its statements of faith, Christian beliefs are still very unfamiliar to Asian eyes, ears and minds.[2] The Asian context generally has two distinct features: poverty and multi-religious traditions. Both features are closely related. In Asia, poverty has never been solely an economic problem. It is inherently associated with life, political culture and spiritual mind-sets.

Asian religious traditions are not confined to the spiritual sphere, but also embrace the totality of the life of the people, including their struggles and sufferings. They are closely related to political aspirations and visions. Yet the evangelistic campaigns of Christianity completely ignore these things. Thus, Christianity is seen to avoid a meaningful relationship with the life and history of the Asian peoples. In the midst of a pluralistic society and a trend toward liberalization among the governments in Asian countries, plus the continuous enlargement of the Christian professional community, even the most conservative churches have begun to realize that social responsibilities cannot be denied. More and more churches hope to strengthen the witness of the gospel through social resources.

The Asian Mission Context

Poverty and religion are two most distinctive features in Asia. There are also other factors prompting Asian churches to rethink their strategic plans.

Urbanization

The urban population in Asia is growing dramatically, especially as many countries have begun vigorous industrialization, a marked change from the past when the population was predominantly rural and agrarian. Urbanization commonly brings with it a host of sociological and behavioural changes. Among these are the impersonalization of relationships, the breakdown of family values leading to social and personal stress, and a more hectic pace of life that adversely affects the functioning of church programmes and activities.

Environment

There has been an increased global concern for the physical environment, especially about how to maintain a sustainable rate of development without harming the prospects of future generations. The effects of decades of abuse and misuse of the environment and physical resources once thought to be unlimited are now visible and have been documented. Asia faces the dangers of physical deterioration as rain-forests shrink, cultivatable soils erode, and air and water become polluted, all at alarming rates, thus posing a serious threat to all systems that support life.

International migration

There have been increasing signs of population shifts across international frontiers. Emigration has become an attractive option for those looking for a better future in more developed countries. Unfortunately, the relocation of large numbers of migrant workers results in both employment opportunities and exploitation. There are considerable costs and implications for families in the countries of destination and in the homelands.

Political restructuring

Though many countries in Asia enjoy some form of political stability which facilitates impressive economic growth, none has yet evolved the ultimate polity. Two opposing trends are evident. Many notorious authoritarian regimes have embarked on a course of democratization. A significant number of them, however, still hold on to the domino theory and have become even more dictatorial. These regimes are afraid to take the risk of giving their subjects 'too much freedom', which may prove detrimental to their ruling position.

Perspectives on the Theology of Mission

There is a need to rethink the meaning of the church and mission. The Greek word *ekklesia* means 'an assembly of people with an objective'. Thus Peter Hodgson states that in Hellenistic Judaism, '*Ekklesia* was used to designate assemblies of both political and religious characters. The assemblies gathered both to praise God and to regulate the affairs of the community.'[3] Hence, *ekklesia* can be used to refer to both religious and social aspects, but in either case it is the gathering of the community which is highlighted. In the Bible, the *ekklesia* is the body of Christ, the people of the Lord, those chosen and called out by God's loving kindness to a service of love by word and deed in the world. Through such a ministry God's church demonstrates the reality of its faith and becomes a genuinely ecclesial community that declares God's glory through its witness in the world.

The mission of the church embraces both its 'religious' (spiritual) activities and its involvement in the material needs of society. Indeed, the two are really inseparable. This parallels our understanding of the 'whole' person which embraces both the physical and the spiritual as an integrated entity. Any attempt to separate the 'sacred' and the 'secular' is a misunderstanding of biblical teaching and, however well intentioned, distorts the ministry of the church, often to the neglect of its role in society. We face a world of hunger, unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities, corruption and exploitation. God is not ignorant of or apathetic about these needs but actively participates in human affairs. Moreover, God chooses to work in partnership with the church to establish his kingdom of righteousness and justice.

Christians usually understand the salvation preached by Jesus in a very personal or individualistic way, but the Jewish concept of salvation is more communal. This is illustrated by the Jewish Passover festival, which celebrates freedom from political and economic bondage, and liberation for the whole community. It is this Passover meal that Jesus celebrated at the Last Supper and which forms the background to the church's commemoration of the Lord's Supper or eucharistic celebration. Thus the communion we experience points beyond our individual and intimate relationship with God, beyond the corporate *koinonia* gathered in worship, to the wider community outside, which stands in need of freedom from economic and spiritual bondage.

Thus the Jewish Passover celebration sheds some light on the church's obligation to seek freedom for society through social concern and nation-building. The church in Asia exists in a society where religion and poverty dominate politics and the entire process of nation-building. To counter this polarization, the church needs a theology of mission which works to identify and share our common concerns with the poor and people of other faiths. It is a theology that is moulded by our communal identity as Christians, a theology of community with communion.

The Mission of the Asian Church

Calling

God calls us to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all the nations. Two-thirds of the world's population lives in Asia, yet Asian Christians only comprise 7 per cent of Asia's peoples.

God's plan of abundant life for the whole of creation is diminished and destroyed by sin and conflict, suffering and oppression. God in Christ Jesus calls us to participate in word and deed for the renewal and transformation of the life of the whole world. It is an urgent call in today's world.

Asian churches have tended to emphasize certain aspects of the Christian gospel and in so doing have confined the revelation of Jesus Christ. The consequence of this tendency is that, consciously or unconsciously, Asian churches have alienated Asian peoples from the Christian community. If the churches in Christ's name alienate others and separate themselves from the people of other faiths, there can be no true identification with the Asian populace, especially with their suffering and struggles. As a result, the churches isolate themselves from the majority.

The small but significant Christian minority amid a vast populace is a factor which must be taken into account by the churches in the development of a theology of mission. The figures mentioned above underline the immensity of the task facing Asian churches and the urgency of prioritizing mission – a mission to propagate the gospel and to root it in the rich soil of Asian society and culture. Such a task requires more than just commitment and vision, it demands wisdom and resources.

Contextualization

God is the Lord of history and works within the history of humankind. In revealing God's selfhood in history, God works through human culture. The churches must attempt to understand the will of God within their own social and cultural contexts. Similarly, they must preach God's message within such contexts. As such, the theology of mission is conceived and created within various different contexts. A theology of mission devoid of its context is meaningless, empty religious jargon.

Contextualization is a passionate cry for the recognition of the significance of this time and this place in understanding the meaning of life.[4] Thus, it pays attention to the process of change, social justice and the human struggle; that is, the actual life situation. 'It is letting theology speak in and through that context.'[5]

Churches must recognize, acknowledge and face squarely the realities of Asian life while continuously reflecting on the message and task of the gospel. This can enable the abstract word of God to become 'incarnated' within human experiences, thus fulfilling Christ's mission 'to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners' (Isaiah 61:1–2). Therefore, churches must concern themselves with the message of Christ and its practical interpretation in service of the masses. The proclamation of the gospel must highlight the prophetic and authentic elements of the biblical message within a real life context. This necessitates a practical expression of that message through a demonstration of a loving, caring concern derived from an identification with people. Thus the churches must learn to 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position' (Romans 12:15–16). The Lord Jesus identified with the poor. He demonstrated solidarity with minorities: with the persecuted, the oppressed and the disadvantaged. Such identification strengthened rather than undermined his proclamation of God's kingdom as it enriched the meaning of incarnation.

As Christianity spread to Asia, Western missionaries repeatedly avoided the theological problems raised by local contexts. Churches became the place for personal salvation but were bereft of social significance and social responsibility, despite the fact that a handful of Asian Christian thinkers dealt with problems such as the relationship of Christianity to national crises and social reconstruction. For example, in China, T. C. Chau and Y. C. Wu started to promote issues concerning the relationship of church and state as early as the 1920s. Unfortunately, the churches did not develop these ideas until Asian societies began to undergo social and political awakenings. At this point, churches were confronted with the realization that mission must involve cultural, political and social concerns.

Theology of ecumenicity in China

Since the 1960s the numerical strength of the church in China has grown unprecedentedly from millions to tens of millions. This is because Chinese churches have discovered the gospel themes that the masses crave: the message of reconciliation within the context of diversity. Thus, in serving society, the churches, although of differing political persuasions and denominations, work together to achieve common objectives.

Bishop K. H. Ting once said, 'Chinese reformers ... aim to transform the life of the people for the better. ... While making a personal choice, the interests of others and the socialist motherland are more often taken into consideration. We admire the immense undertaking of transforming the society and the people. We hope it can be successful. This is the least Christians can do to

demonstrate their love.'[6] This is in fact the theology of John Calvin. Calvin considered all worldly institutions as vehicles which Christians should strive to employ to improve society. As such, churches ought to co-operate with governments. Divine authorities and secular authorities ought to collaborate in a spirit of mutual respect in order to achieve common objectives.

To a very large extent, the church in China has already shed the image of a foreign religion. If external influences are absent, as post-denominationalized, overwhelmingly patriotic and love-thy-neighbour entities, Chinese churches are not far away from being enterprising models of mission.

Theology of friendship in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multi-religious and multi-racial society, predominantly Islamic, that enjoys a volatile and fragile harmony. To maintain peace and justice, national integration and reconciliation are vital ingredients. A theology of mission embracing a strong sense of community is a possible starting point to break down traditional barriers. This approach is characterized by a new attitude on the part of Christians, which involves a radical friendship imbued with the spirit of reconciliation and humility.

In *Christians and Muslims Together* it is observed that it is difficult to shift the deep-seated and often prejudicial Christian attitudes towards members of other faiths. It is suggested that when Christians encounter other faiths they need 'an attitude of openness and humility before another, a willingness to hear and respect points of view, and a desire to let other people be what they are, rather than attempting to make them like oneself as a precondition for friendship.'[7] How do Christians articulate the theology of mission when conversion is unwelcome and triumphalism inappropriate? The answer lies in a theology of friendship that emphasizes the importance of a community. There must be a strong sense of communion as a starting point for building new relationships. In other words, friendship evangelism is the starting point for mission.

At the initiative of the Christians, an inter-religious body named the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism was formed in 1984.[8] It provides a means for mutual consultation and helps reduce inter-religious misunderstanding and hostility, therefore enhancing religious reconciliation in the country. To date, Christianity in Malaysia has been cultivating a multi-racial Christian community, especially in East Malaysia where the Christian population has grown rapidly in recent years. In this way Christians help to promote racial harmony and thus national integration.[9]

It is clear from the above two examples that the mission of Asian churches operates within diverse societies where problems relating to religious pluralism and poverty cannot be avoided. Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Animism and Hinduism influence and mould the religious beliefs and cultural practices of the great majority of Asians. The mission of the churches must re-explore the significance of these religions in the plan of God. Within Asia these religions have

changed and determined the course of history, moulded cultures, inspired literature and art, provided hope, or a means of understanding and hence living, in a complex and often fearful world. What are their places within God's salvific history? And in the midst of struggling with the opportunities and complexities of religious pluralism the churches must not overlook the relevance of the gospel message for the poverty that permeates so much of Asian society.

Professionalism

The greatest blind spot in Asian churches' mission is innocent but superficial theology. Many theologies approach Asian problems by tackling the symptoms without attempting to uncover root causes. Hence, the correct remedies are not prescribed. They lack professionalism in solving complicated problems. For example, poverty cannot be understood by economic analysis alone. Even though economic approaches are extremely important, it is still vital to identify the true root of the problem so that it can be effectively tackled.

Gandhi once pointed out that for the hungry that are struggling at the verge of death, 'freedom' and 'God' are only empty words without meaning. He added that the saviours of these unfortunates are those who give them bread. However, Bishop K. H. Ting believed that evangelism need not focus on poverty, as if the gospel of Christ has only to do with those who suffer. Suffering can enable one to become closer to God as much as it can act as a barrier to knowing God better.

In order for Christianity to take root in Asia and prove acceptable to all, the gospel message must have a significance for both rich and poor. This is a serious and urgent issue that Asian churches must address in a professional manner. They must overcome the deep-seated belief that the sacred and the secular, the religious and the non-religious, are separate. This ancient dualism must be discarded if the seeds of a contextual and holistic theology of mission are to germinate. Furthermore, churches must undertake extensive theological reconstruction. Reconstruction entails the search for the significance and meaning of the relation between Christ and Asian religions, both now and in history. This pilgrimage is necessary if Christianity is to be at home in Asia.

Buddhism originated in India and spread to China and Japan. China shed the Indian form of Buddhism and creatively transformed it; consequently, a genuinely Chinese Chanzong or Zen Buddhism evolved. Japan followed suit. The process of transformation was a laborious undertaking requiring profound knowledge and wisdom. Learned monks and nuns not only had to free themselves from their traditions but also to study the various religious doctrines in order to understand their relevance to their own culture and way of living. Many monks and nuns were widely read and highly educated academicians. Their achievements were extraordinarily impressive.

Islam has been propagated in Malaysia since the tenth century with the arrival of Arab traders. Peninsular Malaysia was subsequently transformed with the Islamization of the Melacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century. Since independence the nation has actively pursued the development of a highly indigenized form of Islam. At present, there are now more than 500 scholars majoring in Islamic studies with Ph.D. degrees. In the local bookshops all types of Islamic books are easily and readily available. They include treatises on the relation of Islam to society, politics, economics, other religions, ideologies and so on. This is impressive! On the other hand, few Malaysian Christians write books on these themes.

The lack of professionalism in Asian churches is a consequence of an inadequate theology of mission. A breakthrough in this area requires a radical rethinking of mission strategy, a renewal of church structures, together with a fresh concern for professionalism. Two approaches are suggested here.

Theological seminaries

The standard of theological education must be improved. Candidates for training increasingly should be university graduates and professionals, so that pastors and missionaries have high academic achievements: a necessary prerequisite for professionalism. Furthermore, theological seminaries must help develop a community of Asian theologians. The making of a genuinely Asian theologian is a harder task than that of making a Western theologian. This is because the former must be conversant with the sophisticated fabric of cultures and religions in Asia, while the latter deals with a more homogeneous society. Most Asian seminarians are trained in the West or by Westerners. This explains why the majority of current 'Asian' theologians are in reality Western products in disguise. Genuine Eastern products with authority and fame are an extremely rare species.

The Asian Christian population is small but theological seminaries are plentiful. There are signs that resources are stretched to the limit. Seminaries associated with the Lutheran confession need to pool their various limited resources and spearhead the establishment of an elite research institute or networking centre that emphasizes innovative Asian studies.

National churches

Asian churches must adjust their operational and financial structures so as to become visionary in their investment in human and material resources. In the midst of an era of professionalization, churches must realize that they will soon exist in a new and demanding milieu. Full-time church work must not be the exclusive preserve of theological graduates, but must extend itself to embrace professionals in other disciplines. This liberalization will then be able to gear churches for the next threshold of development. Such a breakthrough will also lead to quality and professionalized ministries worthy of the third millennium.

Mass Media Evangelization

Electronic broadcasting has been a very effective evangelistic tool, especially for countries where direct evangelism is restricted. Nowadays, the Internet is rapidly becoming the fastest and most effective means of communication that can be deployed for information retrieval, conferences, academic research, tele-medicine and distance learning. This innovation makes the worldwide global village an increasing reality.

The third millennium is a mass media age, and churches must take advantage of it in their mission. Mass media and professionalism are akin to twins; they supplement and complement each other. Churches can employ the Internet to disseminate gospel messages and hymns. They can also convey their concerns about society, politics, economics and cultures via the Internet. In a mass media age, the masses may not need to go to amusement centres for recreation, nor to schools for education. There is even a tendency for Internet war games to replace military exercises. The time may come when Christians may opt not to go to church premises for worship. Indeed, evangelism, pastoral care and counselling may be conducted via mass media, although personal contact is irreplaceable.

Lutheran churches constitute a global virtual community. Whereas the mass media is an attractive means for systematic and effective evangelism, it also enables the Lutheran Federation to be an observer and provide timely and appropriate responses to social, political and economic problems for the welfare of everyone. In this context, the Lutheran World Federation should consolidate the existing communications unit so that more languages are used to network member churches and institutions. By sharing information the Federation can with one voice convey the relevant concern to a community and region.

In addition, church and seminary facilities must be upgraded and go high-tech, because in the third millennium, missiologically speaking, the distance between Jerusalem and the ends of the world has now been 'virtually' reduced to that between a person and a computer terminal. This radical reduction and the drastic change in human needs call for a revolution in the way evangelism is conducted.

Partnership in the Gospel

Paul gave thanks for the believers because of their partnership in the gospel (Philippians 1:5). Countries in the North and the South are gospel partners in Christian history. Regretfully, so far this partnership has been largely one-way. In mission, the North has always been the servant, while the South the mission field. This imbalance all too often causes tension and misunderstanding, as already illustrated.

Even though Asian Christians constitute less than 7 per cent of the population, mission is a

powerful force among Asian churches. In sophisticated Asian societies, missionaries acquire extensive cultural experience and a developed religious spirituality. This strength is heartening in the context of the waning Western missionary enterprise.

If there is no disruption in Asian mission development, the third millennium will see a gospel explosion in Asia. At that time, it is envisaged that partnership in the gospel will assume a reverse trend, with missionaries from the East now becoming Christ's servants in bringing the gospel to an increasingly secularized West. This vision is only feasible on the condition that North–South partnership continues to mature and develop. This strategic alliance in partnership is simple. At present, the North has ample facilities, expertise and resources, while the South has abundant personnel. In order for Christians in the South to be increasingly professional and to fully utilize the potential of mass media, the material resources of the North need to be released, as Asian Christians alone cannot undertake these developments.

A sound North–South partnership can lead to genuine and authentic Christian communion. Through exchange and sharing of each other's resources and spirituality, togetherness in God's mission can be realized, for sharing is the essence of such togetherness.

Conclusion

Despite centuries of presence and nearly a hundred years of self-propagation for hundreds of national churches, Asian Christianity still has not dissociated itself from Western culture and concepts. There is definitely a need to redefine its identity and role. As Asia addresses issues such as poverty and religious diversity and seeks emancipation from the curses accompanying these issues, to what extent has the Christian gospel provided answers? How far has the Christian gospel been interpreted contextually so as to keep in step with rapidly changing and modernizing societies?

The features of the third millennium are likely to be professionalization, pragmatization, diversification and globalization of societies. Amid these monumental changes, the development and mission of the churches need to undergo a paradigm shift. Before reconstruction, deconstruction is imperative. There is a need to re-examine our Christian concepts of ecclesiology and missiology. The gospel message of the churches must address the various needs of the total human being. At the same time, churches' actions should 'incarnate' Christ among the masses.

Today, 60 per cent of Christians live in the southern hemisphere. In Asia, 93 per cent of the population are still unbelievers. For the sake of achieving common goals, partnership in the gospel is imperative. The Lutheran World Federation and its member churches in the North and the South must collaborate and share their resources, experiences and spirituality. To be worthy as living witnesses competent to meet future challenges churches must walk together in God's mission.

Notes

1 The Malays were left untouched through the deliberate divide-and-rule policy of the British administration. Their religion and customs were left undisturbed at the request of the Malay hereditary rulers. Moreover, they were not integrated into colonial economic development; they were intentionally neglected and hence lagged far behind economically and educationally. As for the tribal minorities, they were marginalized and their basic needs were totally disregarded.

2 C. S. Song, *Third Eye Theology* (New York: Maryknoll, 1979).

3 Peter C. Hodgson, *Revisioning the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 25.

4 James Burtness, 'Innovation as the Search for Probabilities: To Re-contextualize the Text', in *Learning in Context* (London: TEF, 1973), p. 13.

5 Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (London: SCM, 1974), p. 21.

6 K. H. Ting, 'To Witness Christ in China', *Nanjing Theological Review* (1984, pp. 9–17).

7 Byron L. Haines and Frank L. Cooley (eds), *Christians and Muslims Together* (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1987), p. 113.

8 The Council held its first conference in 1984. The conference was declared open by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Malaysia. Without Muslim participation, the Council serves as a vehicle for non-Muslim inter-religious consultation and mutual understanding. It has also become an organized channel to promote understanding, mutual respect and co-operation between Muslim and non-Muslim religions.

9 East Malaysia has more than thirty linguistically diverse tribal communities. Apart from the Malay tribes that have Islamic identity, all the others have substantial Christian constituents. All the mainstream churches, such as the Lutheran and the Anglican, have multi-racial followings and they therefore assume a multi-racial outlook. Members do not segregate themselves; they have common places of worship as well as other common facilities. Joint services are conducted in the national language to ensure effective communication.
In response to the needs of churches, a leadership training institute called Sabah Theological Seminary was established ten years ago to provide both theological and cross-cultural training in the national language. This seminary has become the first and, thus far, the only seminary in Malaysia that uses Bahasa Melayu, the national language, as its language of instruction.

TRACK PRESENTATIONS

Track One: **Theological Study on Mission**

Track One concentrated on theological reflections focusing on four interrelated areas of missiological concern, namely, Theology and Mission, Globalization/Contextualization and Mission, Communion and Mission, and Service and Mission.

Theology and Mission

- **Theology: A Tool for Mission?** - Dr. Theodor Ahrens (Germany)
- **Mission and Contemporary Theologies** - Dr. Gordon Jensen (Canada)

Globalization/Contextualization and Mission

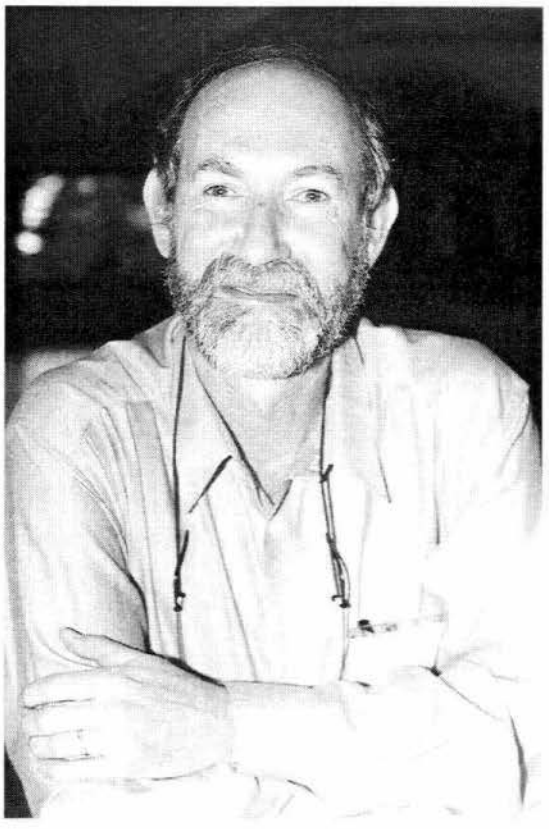
- **Globalization: Challenge and Opportunity for Mission** - Dr. Choong Chee Pang (Singapore)
- **The Challenge of Indigenous Religiosity in Latin America** - Dr. Lothar Carlos Hoch (Brazil)

Communion and Mission

- **Koinonia and Mission** - Dr. Monica Melanchthon (India)
- **Joint Ecumenical Evangelism** - Dr. Wilson Niwagila (Tanzania)

Service and Mission

- **Mission as Diaconia** - Dr. Kjell Nordstokke (Norway)
- **Witness through Service** - Rev Marta Kovacs Toth (Hungary)



Theology: A Tool for Mission?

Theodor Ahrens

Probing the Theology–Praxis Relationship

In my little workshop back home I store a few tools which I use from time to time when I try my hand at a bit of simple repair work around the house or to build a swing for my grandchildren. Tools are functional in relation to certain work to be done. Is it possible to compare theology in general and missiology in particular to the functionality of such tools? My invitees placed a question mark in the title of my talk. In what follows I want to explore the meaning of that question mark.

The text that follows has five sections. First, I suggest that there are various ways of doing theology and that theologizing constitutes a praxis in its own right. Second, from there I move to the field of praxis. There is certainly more than one way to look at praxis. Can we place that ambiguity in a missiological perspective? Third, while missiology may not be very helpful in providing models for mission, theology may – at a lower level of expectation – be helpful to identify a few key issues – among the many hundreds competing for our attention – likely to stay at the top of the missiological agenda and the agenda of missionary praxis. Fourth, I then venture beyond the boundaries of my own discipline in order to suggest that theology may in fact be a much needed contributor to the well-being of church and society. Fifth, I conclude with a few remarks regarding the status of missiology and the future of Christian mission.

I am fully aware that in what follows a Western European perspective prevails. Each and every point I am going to raise may have a different or possibly even no application at all in other parts of the world. Even so, this paper still might serve the purpose of our discussions.

Various Styles of Doing Theology

When I was a young pastor and tutor for the doctoral programme of the Academy of Missions at the University of Hamburg in the late 1960s and early 1970s, liberation theologians insisted that praxis was the decisive, in fact the *only* reference point for any theological endeavour. Even more: in order that theology may serve the mission of Christ, theologians needed to leave the lecture hall, physically and metaphorically. They needed to 'cross over' into that unknown world of poor people's experience in order to learn a new perspective and to understand more radically the issues that 'really' were at stake. Theology was legitimate only as a reflection growing out of an ongoing involvement with and commitment to the gospel-sponsored process of liberation.

All of us have heard and pondered this. Many of us have crossed boundaries, exploring the depth and the width of 'liberation'. Yet we have not dissolved our theological faculties. The library, the lecture halls, the campuses are still there. Inasmuch as we are theological teachers and researchers most of us continue to teach in faculties. So, does everything remain unchanged then? Not quite. What is acknowledged though is that no story of faith and salvation, no story of despair and disaster, no story of healing and liberation shall be told and interpreted without giving space to the voices of those concerned, the poor and the broken, the disadvantaged and the scapegoats. As theology in general and missiology in particular take account of their witness, they clarify where, with whom and for whom they themselves are theologizing.

While to me this seems to be the important outcome of the theory–praxis debate of those years, I should like to suggest that there is more than a 'one-way-only' approach to the theology–praxis issue, simply because there are different styles of doing theology, a couple of which I shall now briefly describe.

'People's theology' entails a specific notion regarding the theology–praxis relationship. It is a theology of wisdom expressing itself in myths, stories, pictures, dreams, prophecies, songs, dances and rituals; in brief, a world of poiesis and poetics. The irrefutable contribution of this style of theologizing is to insist that human reality cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional world of empiricism.[1] Praxis in this perspective is the praxis of people who remember traditions. They are building jig-saw puzzles so-to-say, which symbolize not so much how things have been, but who they are and who they want to be. They then put the interpretative power of such 'stories' to the test as they go along.

There may be creativity in such a way of theologizing, but there is no scholarly dimension in this form of reflexivity. This dimension would be added if the people concerned were to step back a little in order to evaluate the inner coherence of such story materials and find out whether they may be considered a dialect of the language of Christian faith,[2] of which the gospel is the fountain and Jesus the key witness. In fact, wisdom-theology needs such exposure to explicit and critical self-reflexivity.

This then leads on to another style of theologizing: theology as a scholarly, academic endeavour. I suggest that a scholarly way of doing theology is endowed with a legitimacy of its own. Not each and every theological thought, essay or project needs to show an immediately self-evident 'applicability' on the level of praxis. If we pursue such a scholarly style of theologizing we are not necessarily forgetful of praxis. Academic theological work is needed and does have a value in itself.

Theology does not reflect on faith as truth, then on real-life situations as the area where such insights into truth will find their application. To imagine that it does would be a fundamental misunderstanding of the theological enterprise. What is at stake here is the praxis of faith itself. Theology reflects the total human condition in the light of faith, and again faith in Christ in view

of the total human endeavour.[3] In this perspective the theology–praxis issue lies at the very heart of the theological enterprise as such.

Christianity is committed to providing a public account of the plausibility and inner coherence of the language of faith. This commitment dates back to early Christianity, when the author of the Gospel of John decided to co-opt from popular Greek philosophy the concept of the 'Logos' to interpret the meaning of Christ. Since that decision stuck, Christianity was committed to provide a public account of the plausibility of Christian faith, of the inner coherence of a Christian outlook on life. While the language of faith reigns on the level of praxis, theology is concerned with the grammar of faith.[4] Such reflection needs its own time and space. It represents a praxis in its own right – the praxis of doing theology – regardless of whether or not any practical application is instantaneously obvious. Church and society, for their own well-being, need people, places and institutions where such self-reflexive Christianity flourishes. They will benefit in the long run and in ways which cannot easily be foreseen.

Different styles of 'doing' theology need not be mutually exclusive, at least not those mentioned above. They represent legitimate theological styles which may well be pursued concurrently. In fact, in each of our lives they are probably both represented and to a greater or lesser degree intertwined.[5] In each of these styles the theology–praxis issue is acknowledged, but accentuated differently.

In summary we may say that the praxis of faith needs theology. Conversely, theology which does not accept the praxis of faith and the realities of the human condition for its horizon, will become a sterile and futile exercise.

Most contemporary theological training and reflection is shaped by a fair amount of disregard for mission and missiology.[6] Mainstream Protestant churches and their respective training institutions seem to be shifting emphasis from missiology to religious studies as a separate discipline. Many theologians consider that 'mission' as a dimension of the gospel and of Christianity is well taken care of by the five classical disciplines of Old and New Testament Studies, Church History, Systematics and Pastoral Theology. According to this view, there is no need whatsoever for missiology as a sixth discipline. If one does insist on the need for missiology, what does it contribute that the other disciplines tend to ignore?

Naming Praxis: A Missiological Perspective

Praxis is ambiguous, just as ambiguous as life itself. Richard Sennett[7] suggests that people who undergo numerous and rapid transitions forced on them by society, and who are faced by seemingly endless demands requiring great flexibility, eventually lose their capacity to make coherent sense of their lives. The many ruptures, fractures and cleavages which modern market society creates are so wide and deep that it is often difficult and perhaps impossible to provide a coherent account of where people come from and what they aspire to be.

There is of course an abundance of (sometimes scrap) material of which people could make use to piece together the narratives of their lives, their joy and laughter, their despair and destruction. In a strictly theological sense a more urgent need might be for a plausible frame of reference to accommodate those materials so that human experiences are really taken account of. What is needed, then, might be a counter-story[8] to provide a setting for the human drama; a meta-story with a reservoir of meaning from which people struggling to name praxis in their common daily lives could draw.[9] Without involving themselves in the construction of such counter-stories people cannot survive. In fact, putting together such stories from available bits and pieces is a means of protest against their death as individuals and as groups.[10]

The gospel story suggests that people may face their past honestly without being destroyed and may discover a meaning in their lives transcending the wisdom of daily common sense. As this suggestion is pondered, rejected or integrated into one's own perspective, the totality of a life's 'praxis' is interpreted in the process.

There is no guarantee of 'success' in this endeavour. Time and again it happens that the biblical narrative or parts of it remain elusive, dark and unintelligible. Indeed, some Bible stories resist use as materials to fill biographical potholes. In other words, the biblical narrative is not that easily co-opted to construct a coherent and meaningful narrative of our lives. It is a double-edged thing: the narrative is meant to provide a framework for meaning, but at the same time for many people the very meaning of the Jesus-story escapes them.[11] The gospel appears to be 'alien' (John 1:10–11, 31, 33) and there is no inculturation of the gospel without its 'demythologizing' basic cultural assumptions.

If people looking for materials suitable to make sense of their lives do not find them within our Christian heritage they must and will find them elsewhere. Praxis is being named either way. The real test for Christian mission is whether people will continue to draw on the gospel narratives as they construct their jig-saw puzzles to symbolize meaning for their lives.[12] The mission of Christianity is to enter into such dialogical processes with people.

The praxis of such dialogical witness is not exhausted in the offer of words. Time and again it happens that people moved by an inner vision of a life renewed in the Spirit of Christ will cross boundaries for the sake of other people's life struggles, setting aside concerns about how they themselves are getting on in life. Whoever approaches the mystery of life in that manner has come close to the mystery of Christ, indeed has discovered the meaning of the prayer 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done'.

Such witness to Christ's kingdom will be placed side by side with other stories which have a path of their own to suggest. Yet the Christian story is being told not only as a story alongside many other stories; it is also – without any triumphalism – being told in the confidence that the world has its proper place within this story.[13]

Missiology deals with the fall-out from the intercultural dynamics of Christianity. Missiology aims to interpret those processes in which the Christian meta-story inspires new responses, answers of faith, and new social configurations; processes of ecclesiogenesis as well as those in which it loses or even forfeits its power to interpret people's life struggles.[14] In this way the missiological undertaking boils down to a new description of Christianity in the world and for the world. Attempts to systematize the interpretation of such processes into a form of intercultural hermeneutics have not been successful as yet. We always seem to end up with a narrative of multifaceted inculturations, documenting that Christ cannot be made the captive of any church or the property of any confessional book. The language of faith produces many Christian dialects.

Such diversity often leads to disputes – sometimes quite intense – as to what constitutes an 'authentic' response to the Christ-story. Such disputes are inevitable; in fact they are healthy as long as they are conducted in a spirit of mutual accountability. Only if such disputes died out should we be worried, because the intercultural dynamics of Christianity might have exhausted themselves.

Praxis, then, can be defined as people commenting on their lives and with their lives' inherited or newly offered 'stories of meaning'. The praxis of theology or missiology would be to decode the 'grammar', the inner coherence of such comments.

The Infamous 'Millennial Threshold': What Do We Know?

The infamous millennial threshold is clouded by a lot of fog. We certainly cannot look very far ahead. What do we really know about future missiological challenges? The history of Christian missions will continue to be a mixture of improvisations in unforeseen circumstances, 'a series of responses to impromptu events',[15] in which the relationship between theology and praxis remains ambiguous.

Not only are we uncertain as to what will next pop up on our missionary agenda; we are just as uncertain about the lifespan of our theological frameworks. Clearly, our frameworks for theological understanding, our theological 'paradigms',[16] last for ever-shorter periods of time. Classical liberal theology reigned for about a century; dialectic and kerygmatic theology of the word for a little less than fifty years; then we witnessed a theology of revolution – just a flicker – and after that a few years followed by theologies of development, theologies of liberation and other hyphenated theologies. They lasted for a couple of decades. The ever-increasing pace of socio-cultural change seems to shorten the lifespan of our theological paradigms or frames of reference.

It is not very likely therefore that we will be able to come up with 'an emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm'[17] valid for a few decades. This may not be all that tragic. The history of

Christian mission has not been and will not be a field where models or paradigms of mission are implemented.[18] But it may be possible to name a few key issues which are likely to stand out in terms of importance and may remain at the top of the ecumenical and missionary agenda for a while, at least the agenda of European churches. A few such issues are poverty, its relationship with Pentecostal and conciliar churches, and violence. Once again, this list reflects my own context.

Can poverty be overcome? We do not know for certain. Can churches contribute in a decisive way to overcoming violence? We do not know for certain. But we do know with a fair amount of certainty that poverty will remain a problem on a global scale for decades. And we do recognize that poverty and the poor constitute not just a moral but a theological and ecclesiological challenge.

We are uncertain whether poverty on a global scale can be overcome.[19] If our guess or our sense of mission is that it can be overcome, are we certain that religion in general and Christianity in particular can play a decisive role in this? What do we really know about religion and 'development'? What do we know about Christianity and the poor?

We do know that the process of de-Westernization of Christianity went along with its pauperization. We may also suggest that Christianity in the West has for long periods of time drawn major support from lower-class people and the impoverished. The almost total disappearance of poverty in Western Europe may have been a major factor in weakening broad-based support for Christianity.[20] At present, churches in the North are experiencing a financial crisis which is also a crisis of commitment on the part of its membership.

What do such contradictory developments entail with regard to our understanding of 'ecumenical solidarity' and 'holistic mission'? Churches in the South and churches in the North proclaim that they pursue a holistic notion of mission[21] and a praxis of 'comprehensive ministry'. Yet things are falling apart for us in the North and for others elsewhere. What does holism mean in the South and in the North? Options for the poor in the South and options for the poor[22] on the part of conciliar churches (both North and South) will remain an irksome problem in North–South and East–West relationships.

What can missiology do? At this stage, probably little more than try to determine in what way religion in general and Christianity in particular tie in with the issue of poverty. We do know that, following the precedent set by Israel, Christianity – however differently it may have been contextualized in various places – is quite firm in establishing a link between faith in God and love for one's fellow human beings. And this linkage may set Christianity apart from other religions. How does the biblical precedent for such a firm linkage provide us with guidelines for a shared praxis of holistic mission? The answer is far from clear.

Christianity: A Poor People's Religion?

Many conciliar churches are irritated by those Christian renewal groups – be they charismatics or Pentecostals – which presently form the most noticeable missionary power within Christianity. Mainstream churches in the South affiliated with ecumenical bodies like the World Council of Churches or the Lutheran World Federation are a little upset at times, often because such phenomena not only occur 'outside' but sometimes 'inside' their own constituencies.

The Pentecostals are certainly irritating! Sometimes they appear very naive, and at times they are prone to fundamentalism. What to do? A popular response would be to re-emphasize borders and to design strategies which make border-crossings difficult: 'You invade my garden, then I raise my fence!'

It is precisely with reference to situations which are disruptive in terms of social, moral and political 'wholeness' that at least two different dialects have emerged within Christian world mission. I do not claim that Pentecostalism is caused by social and political deprivation and that it only spreads among poor people. However, social and moral disorientation – plus a few holes in our inherited religious umbrellas – may lead to Pentecostal responses.

Mainstream churches have accepted the notion of progress and emphasize the importance of consciousness raising and learning for those who want to share in progress. Education and social action are to provide the poor with new options for social and political participation. People in their God-given freedom are co-responsible for their fate and for the fate of creation. The meaning of Christian mission is spelled out in a language of 'awareness building' or 'intercultural learning'. This type of response prevails in Protestant mainstream churches both in the South and in the North.

Poor people's Pentecostalism addresses the same problem in a different idiom. For those who simply cannot see themselves or their children on a path leading to 'progress', for those throw-away people who do not see a way out or upwards, there is literally only one way, namely an emotionally deep and symbolically mediated experience re-integrating them into a 'new family': the family guided by the Spirit of Jesus. It is this experience of re-integration, restoring their sense of dignity and confidence, which may lead to the formation of new patterns of relationships, of new clusters of belonging and new models of Christian mutuality which may have some cultural significance for society as a whole. But we are not sure whether things will indeed go this way.[23]

If someone should ask whether the future holds better prospects for conciliar mainstream churches or for Pentecostalism, the response should be: 'It depends!' It depends whether secularization gains a footing in the non-Western world just as it did in Europe. Does the process of secularization which took place in Europe constitute the exception or the rule?[24] It may be

possible that we are witnessing a transformation of Christianity on a world scale without quite knowing where we are heading.

Missiology can try to identify the problem, locate centres of eruptions, interpret local particularities and place trends within an intercultural perspective. Missiology will point out the interdependence of developments in conciliar and non-conciliar churches. Missiology will explore how in either idiom the two questions as to what may and should people expect of God and only of God, and what may fellow human beings rightfully expect of Christians, are being answered. Missiology will analyse both idioms in relation to the guiding 'sola principles' – no more and no less.

Violence and the Mission of Reconciliation

In pre-modern times violence may have enjoyed a kind of unreflective acceptability. Today, when violence erupts around the globe like a string of volcanoes, or rather like landmines exploding beneath our feet, it is rapidly losing its acceptability. Violence is increasingly recognized as a missiological and ecumenical concern and discussed as such. The gospel places the issue of violence at centre-stage. As far as we know violence is at the root of every society and tends to occur when rapid social, economic and religious changes affect individuals and communities. Again, my views are coloured by my context.

In Europe our grandparents entered the twentieth century with great optimism. Enlightenment, science and economics had brought much progress; the rivalry of European nation-states seemed domesticated. Churches tied their sense of mission to the mission of Western civilization, to social and economic progress and human rights. This ended with the First World War and the establishment of enormously powerful terrorist ideologies like fascism and Stalinism. Neither Nazism nor communism could maintain their grip on societies without constructing terrible and gigantic machineries for scapegoating. Churches were not in a position to unseat these powers. In many cases churches were even blinded, unable or unwilling to recognize their demoniacal power.

If violence continues on the present scale it is likely to make its way further up the missionary agenda for a long time. It may even claim a key position on our agenda, so that missiology would need to develop a hermeneutics of violence and reconciliation, and in doing so discover foundation stones for a hitherto somewhat evasive intercultural hermeneutics.

Violence erupts in those old and newly established nation-states which try to integrate traditionally separate groups (so-called ethno-religious conflicts). Wherever boundaries are defined there is always a temptation to try to functionalize those religions which are in place. Is religion a causative factor or is it drawn into what are essentially non-religious conflicts about the control of political institutions and natural resources? Who has the authority and power to define boundaries? What role do religions play in defining boundaries? What role did and do

churches play *vis-à-vis* violence in ethnic conflicts? Whom do they speak for if they speak out in such conflicts?

We do not know whether repressive and corrupt political systems can eventually be transformed in a process of democratization and the adoption of human rights as a frame of reference for living together. Likewise, we do not know whether democratic processes which seem firmly established can be maintained or are likely to be undermined by media manipulation (e.g. in the USA and Europe). We do not know whether it is really possible to universalize the human rights tradition which since the 1960s has effectively provided a frame of reference for social ethics and social action by the LWF and the WCC among others.

The issue of violence is an important dimension of gender conflict, which is likely to stay with us for quite some time. This will concern us in more than one way. It does already concern us in the ordination debate. When the delegates attending the LWF Assembly in Curitiba in 1990 overwhelmingly voted to introduce women's ordination within the next five years many of them overestimated their powers of persuasion or underestimated their opponents back home. Is ordination or non-ordination of women really still a theological debate or simply a human rights issue? Again, the question is who is authorized to establish boundaries regarding shares in power.

Violence has been an issue in inter-religious encounters in the past and it will continue to be a concern in the future. Usually, religions do not encounter each other on an equal footing. Asymmetrical relationships are the rule, since religions are differently based on and backed by the social structures of any given society. Therefore, they are constantly tempted to take advantage of each other, to exploit advantages of influence where and when they are given. It is in this context that churches are challenged to reconsider their notions of and motivations for mission.[25] I do not suggest that all religions offer identical solutions to salvation. Rather, they make proposals which differ.[26] This is why we will continue to talk *with* each other, not just *about* each other. Poverty and violence will be among the criteria of relevancy for these encounters.

The above illustrations underscore my suggestion that violence will be a missiological and ecumenical concern. What ties them together is whether our concern with violence can claim any missiological status. How does violence concern churches in their sense of mission?

First of all, it concerns them in terms of social ethics. Is violence an unavoidable part of any cultural and civil process? Can violence be un-learned? Can violence be overcome or at least delegitimized, contained and pushed back?

Second, it concerns them in terms of the substance of the Christian message. A polarity of violence and reconciliation lies at the very root of the gospel.[27] What happens to churches and congregations which make the struggle against violence a central focus of their preaching, their mission and their dealings with each other?[28]

Reconciliation, of course, cannot be enforced, just as truth cannot be enforced. People involved in violence will try to evade the truth. Likewise Christians and churches. Yet the gospel should continue effectively to remind churches not to lose sight of the fact that violence does not just have social and political dimensions, but also religious ones as well. As Václav Havel suggested, the word 'reconciliation' has in recent years become a standard coinage in political and historical discourse. Politicians and journalists talk about reconciling nations, races, churches, religions. Such reconciliation will not be possible unless the truth of the past has been faced, forgiveness sought and a trusting relationship restored between people and groups.[29] Where does all this come from? The gospel reminds churches that the story of God taking the initiative to reconcile the world with himself through Christ is even more central than the issue of violence (2 Corinthians 5.18–21).

Churches in general and theology in particular contribute to the well-being of society by insisting that people who make reconciliation the aim of their historical stock-taking are tapping divine resources.[30] In saying this we have effectively addressed our next concern.

Theology's Contribution to the Well-being of Society

I should like to suggest that theology contributes to the well-being of church and society by making Christian faith as difficult as necessary. The responsibility of teachers in theological education is not to make faith as easy as possible, nor to make it as difficult as possible; rather, it is to make it as difficult as necessary, no more and no less.

What does that mean? I do not question the belief that faith should help people develop a sense of belonging, rootedness and direction. Yet the gospel does not offer an easy way out for people who feel over-burdened by life's turmoil. Christianity does not request people to gamble away their intellect, their conscience or their accountability.

We contribute to the well-being of society by graduating students who have understood and internalized that our sense of vocation and service needs a dimension of self-reflexivity and of public accountability. Students, of course, do not graduate with a rucksack full of ready-made answers. They should graduate with a competency to interpret those 'stories of meaning' mentioned above. This requires involvement and the distance which goes with a critical self-reflexivity. Along with a sense of vocation, theological education has to cultivate such self-reflexivity. If theological training centres succeed in achieving this, then they are making an essential contribution to the well-being of church *and* society. In this sense theology and theological education are not only useful. They cannot be dispensed with without grave consequences.

As theology encourages an ever-fresh inquisitiveness, helps to identify issues, and names the partners in conflict, it helps to nurture an atmosphere of openness in church and society. If our

graduates have internalized this then they will graduate with a relaxed confidence that they can contribute not only in the context of village life, but also where decision-makers and opinion-leaders do business.

I am aware that many decision-makers and opinion-leaders do not expect much, if anything, from the churches towards the well-being of society. However, there are others among them who definitely and sometimes desperately wait for the churches and their theologians to contribute to the well-being of society, not by swelling the inflationary output of moral appeals, but by pointing out key issues concerning the welfare of people, by insisting that these issues be discussed freely, and by revealing how the churches themselves are dealing with them.

In addition, theology renders a service to the well-being of society by reminding both church and society that, underneath an apparent pragmatism and widespread cynicism, people continue to be concerned with basic questions such as does the universe have a meaning? What does God have to do with the portion of ill-fate and suffering which 'we' are carrying as individuals or as groups? Do reconciliation and justice have any future in a world filled with violence, cynicism and mammonism? An irreplaceable contribution to the well-being of church and society is made if theology can help churches and their workers answer these questions effectively .

Theology contributes to the well-being of society by cultivating a sense of history: How do we deal with history – which for good or ill is now our common history – between North and South and East and West? How do we remember history in general and church and mission history in particular? The study of history does not support the kind of moral one-upmanship which seems so very fashionable today. A careful study of history helps us focus more sharply on questions like how did things actually happen? How do Christians live with their awareness of how things happened in the past? How do Christians deal with accountability and forgiveness? How should the public deal with such questions? Churches discussing this honestly and frankly do a great service to the public.[31]

Conclusion

I have not suggested any plan of action. I have however suggested that theology in general may be indispensable for the well-being of church and society, even if theological faculties are not 'answering machines'.

I suggest that Missiology as a theological discipline should not be optional but established as a sixth theological discipline in all institutions of higher theological training. Missiology does contribute a specific perspective: in dealing with the kinds of issues mentioned above it tries to keep the particular and the global together. Churches in the North are discovering contextuality, while churches in the South are confronted with globalization. Missiology helps us to de-provincialize our conscience while emphasizing at the same time our contextuality. Maybe we should start to develop something like a missiological curriculum, a missiological frame of

reference for training institutions in the North and South.[32] Missiology will remind the other disciplines that the gospel concerns everyone and that whatever responses the gospel has found elsewhere is of concern to the Oikumene.

Amid the missions of others, Christians remain committed to a mission of love and service in the Spirit of Christ. The meaning of such mission is certainly not exhausted in dialogue, but just as certainly it cannot be lived apart from a dialogical existence. Missiology will work at a post-colonial understanding of mission. It is no longer acceptable to visualize Christian mission as a kind of spiritual warfare. Such forms of religious violence should be excluded in the light of the very roots of Christian faith. Maybe we are entering a new phase of mission in which we do not place our own visions and hopes above those of others, but alongside them. We will not exploit the weakness of others and try to conquer them in their vulnerability. As long as inter-religious relationships (and inter-church relationships!) are tainted by threats or even by violence we cannot talk of Christian mission in any meaningful sense.

We may have already entered a new stage, a process of mutuality, in which we search not for the weak spots of others, but for their strong points, trusting that anyone faced with the Jesus-story may at some stage discover his or her truth. We seek the Jews in their Jewishness, the Greeks in their spirit of freedom, the Muslims in their commitment to God's will, the Buddhists in their search to uncover the root causes of suffering. Maybe our contribution in that mutuality would be no more than to suggest that in our perspective God appears to be like Christ.[33] Christians believe, celebrate and acknowledge that the Jesus name has been given a place in God.

If, in the past, it was not only acceptable but, in fact, an expression of the missionary dynamics of Christianity to identify Jesus not as one among many, but as the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord, etc., it should appear just as legitimate to continue this process of intercultural translation and call him the Heliand, the Avatara, the Buddha, the Protoancestor, the First-born from the Dead, etc.[34]

Time and again the meaning of the Jesus figure is interpreted within the terms of reference provided by a 'pre-Christian' language or a 'pre-Christian' symbolic system. As this is being done local christologies emerge which seem to differ. Do contextual christologies have anything in common in formal terms and in terms of substance? Yes, I should think so. Each in their own way suggests that in view of the Jesus-story any person, woman or man, should be able to discover that we owe God nothing except faith (and that even the granting of faith is pure gratuity!), and therefore there is no question of indebtedness or obligation. Christian witness then would suggest that in the image of Christ people anywhere should be able to discover God as companion of their freedom and guardian of their dignity. Responding to the Jesus name and its story, people may discover their liberation from the law of sacrificial services and thus be reconciled by a God who needs no sacrifices to secure their and God's own future. What reconciliation means is impossible to exhaust or even to spell out without reference to the Jesus name.[35]

Common sense would expect that the future of Christian missions will depend on churches making the many adjustments which changing circumstances seem to require. The church will change and must change, of course, but eventually the future of Christian missions will depend on whether in rapidly changing circumstances form will reign over substance, religious marketing over solidarity, morality over faith.[36] I think what really will matter in the future is whether or not we can cultivate a praxis of faith which points to Jesus as 'the Way' and 'the Life' in a mission of love and service (Mark 10.43).

Notes

1 Hermann Janssen, the founder of the Melanesian Institute in Papua New Guinea and a true ecumenist to whose memory this paper is dedicated, has always tried to draw our attention to this vital area of theological creativity. See, for instance, Hermann Janssen, Solidarität, 'Lebenseinheit und Basisgemeinschaften in Afrika', in *Religion und sozialer Wandel*, ed. Hugo Bogensberger et al. Veritas, Linz-Passau 1986, 119–39.

2 Cf. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (SPCK, London 1984, 73ff). German translation: *Christliche Lehre als Grammatik des Glaubens. Religion und Theologie im postliberalen Zeitalter.* Mit einer Einleitung von Hans G. Ulrich und Thomas Hütter, aus dem Amerik. Englischen von Markus Müller, Gütersloh 1994.

3 Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, Studium der Theologie. Eine enzyklopädische Orientierung, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1975, 118ff; idem, Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens I, Tübingen 1979, 22ff., 105ff.

4 Cf. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* 73ff.

5 Cf. Max L. Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Eerdmanns, Michigan 1988, 29ff., 84ff.).

6 Generally speaking, Evangelicals and Roman Catholics are more articulate, emphasizing a need for missiology as a theological concern in its own right and as a theological discipline. Recently, the Vatican, preparing for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of Asia, strongly suggested that 'A truly Catholic theology of mission needs to be fostered in all seminaries and formation centres of religions in Asia. This is vital for the future of mission in Asia.' 'Lineamenta for the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of Asia, Origins', CNS Documentary Service, Jan. 23, 1997, Vol. 26, No. 31, 516.

7 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character* (W. W. Norton, New York 1998). I used the German edition: *Der flexible Mensch. Die Kultur des neuen Kapitalismus*, Berlin 1988, 2. Aufl., cf. p. 18

8 Cf. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* 62ff, 82ff. For further discussion on Lindbeck see John Milbank, *Theology as Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1995, 382ff., 392ff.).

9 Cf. Kenelm Burridge, *In the Way: A Study of Christian Missionary Endeavours* (UBC Press, Vancouver 1991); Dietrich Ritschl, *Zur Logik der Theologie. Kurze Darstellung der Zusammenhänge theologischer Grundgedanken.* Chr. Kaiser, München 1988, 39ff., 72ff., 142ff., 286ff.

10 Ina-Maria Greverus, *Neues Zeitalter oder Verkehrte Welt, Anthropologie als Kritik.* Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1990, 222ff.

11 Hans Visser's observations and reflections in this regard are helpful. See his 'Reflections on Mission in the Post-Modern Context', *IRM* 345, April 1988, 257–63.

12 Cf. Theodor Ahrens, 'Christianity in a Multiplicity of Cultures: The European Context', LWF Documentation No. 37, Geneva 1995, 53–81, also in *Jahrbuch für Kontextuelle Theologie*, IKO Verlag für interkulturelle Kommunikation, Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio e.V., Aachen 1995, 52–76.

13 Cf. Milbank, *Theology as Social Theory,* 385.

14 For details see Theodor Ahrens, 'Mission unter Missionen. Die 'Jesusstory' im Spannungsfeld von Regionalität und Globalisierung – eine Standortbestimmung', in idem (ed.), Zwischen Regionalität und Globalisierung, Verlag an der Lottbek, Ammersbek 1997, 15–51; English version forthcoming in *Mission Studies.*

15 John V. Taylor, 'The Future of Christianity', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 1992, 628–65.

16 Hans Küng was among the first to adopt the term to identify theological models and he further used it to come to terms with the obvious pluriformity within Roman Catholicism. See Hans Küng, *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View* (Doubleday, New York 1987, 123ff.). For missiology see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, New York 1991, 181ff.). Critical comments on such terminology from Dietrich Ritschl are noted in 'Ökumenische Theologie', in: idem. and W. Ustorf, Ökumenische Theologie/Missionswissenschaft. W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1994, 28ff. Cf. also Marc Spindler's review of David Bosch's work, in *Exchange*, 20, (1991) 2, 156–8.

17 Bosch, *Transforming Mission,* 368ff., summarizes in a great 'summa missionum' under such a heading each and every previous 'paradigm' of mission.

18 In fact 'models for mission' more often than not may have been 'models of mission'. Cf. Marc Spindler's observation regarding Bosch's presentation of historical paradigms of mission in his review of Bosch's magnum opus, in *Exchange.*

19 At the beginning of the nineteenth century poverty in Europe seemed to be a fate almost inescapable for those with whom it had caught up. At that time it was still hard to imagine that it could be overcome at all. Yet in our society poverty had been almost completely eradicated until its recent return – even if in a much-reduced form compared to my great-grandparents' times.

20 Cf. A. J. Wichers, 'Some Reflections on the Position of the Christian Religion in a Situation of Affluence: The Welfare State', in Pieter H. Vrijhof and Jacques Waardenburg (eds), *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious*

Studies (Mouton, The Hague 1979, 200–17).

21 Cf. Michael Taylor, '"Not a Penny for the Missionaries": The Debate about Holism', in *Not Angels but Agencies: The Ecumenical Response to Poverty – A Primer* (WCC, Geneva 1995, 21–45).

22 Cf. Felix Winfred, 'Die Option für die Armen und die Option der Armen', *ZMR* 4, 1991, 257–73.

23 Regarding this uncertainty cf. Juan Sepúlveda, 'Future Perspectives for Latin American Protestantism', *IRM* 345, April 1998, 189–203, particularly p. 193; cf. also David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1990, 271ff.).

24 David Martin, 'Europa und Amerika. Säkularisierung oder Verfielfältigung der Christenheit – Zwei Ausnahmen und keine Regel', in Otto Kallscheuer (Hg.) *Das Europa der Religionen*, S. Fischer, Frankfurt/M. 1996, 161–80; cf. also José Casanova, 'Chancen und Gefahren öffentlicher Religion', in the same book, pp. 181–210.

25 For details, see Theodor Ahrens, 'Mission and Dialogue: Contradictory or Complementary?', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 4, 1996–7, 314–20.

26 Cf. S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Orbis Books, New York, 1995).

27 René Girard, *Der Sündenbock*, Benzinger, Zürich 1988; French: *Le Bouc émissaire*, Paris 1982; cf. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, *The Gospel and the Sacred: Poetics of Violence in Mark* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1994); Robert R. Beck, *Nonviolent Story: Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY 1996); Théo Tschuy, *Ethnic Conflict and Religion: Challenge to the Churches* (WCC, Geneva 1997).

28 The WCC has done its member churches a great service by making this an important part of our ecumenical agenda. Cf. *Overcome Violence, A Programme of the World Council of Churches* (WCC, Geneva 1997).

29 Václav Havel, 'Vorwort zum Themenheft 'Versöhnung' der Ökumenischen Rundschau', April 1997, 46. Jg., H. 2, 132ff.

30 Cf. Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of Nations* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1998, 26ff.).

31 Cf. Klaus-M. Kodalle, *Verzeihung nach Wendezeiten? Über Unnachsichtigkeit und mißlingende Selbstentschuldung*, Verlag Palm und Ende, Erlangen und Jena 1994; cf. also Gerhard Besier and Gerhard Sauter, *Wie Christen ihre Schuld bekennen, Die Stuttgarter Erklärung 1945*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen 1985.

32 A documentation of missiology as a fully grown academic discipline and an important tool for future missiological teaching and research has been provided by Jan A. B. Jongeneel, 'Philosophy, Science and Theology of Mission in the 19th and 20th Centuries', *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*, Nos. 92, 106. Peter Lang, Frankfurt/M. 1995 (Vol. 1) and 1997 (Vol. 2).

33 John V. Taylor, *The Future of Christianity*.

34 Cf. John D'Arcy May, 'Synkretismus oder Synthese? Eine antizipatorische Skizze des religiösen Wandels im Pazifik', in Hermann P. Siller (ed.), *Suchbewegungen. Synkretismus – Kulturelle Identität und kirchliches Bekenntnis*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1991, 185–92.

35 On reconciliation as the key issue of Christian mission, cf. Robert J. Schreiter CPPS, *Reconciliation, Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Orbis Books, New York 1992); also Gerard M. Goldman, 'Reconciliation: An Urgent Task, A Review of Literature', *Nelen Yubu*, No. 66, 1997, No. 2, 1–23.

36 'So the division that matters most for the church today and tomorrow is not that between Catholic and Evangelical, or political right and left, but whether in any matter the form or the content is of prior importance.' John V. Taylor, *The Future of Christianity*, p. 660.

In memoriam Hermann Janssen

Mission and Contemporary Theologies

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How central is mission to contemporary theological discourse? Such a question suggests that there already is some connection between mission and contemporary theologies. A more basic question is, 'What do contemporary theologies have to do with mission?'

A common initial answer to this question is 'nothing'. After all, what does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What do liberation theologies developed in specific geographical, socio-economic, cultural, historical and ethnic contexts, have to do with the eternal mission of God or the mission of the church? Mission is focused on the spiritual, while contemporary theologies are physical, contaminated with the dirt and dust and agendas of humanity, the here and now. Contemporary theologies have been portrayed as 'chameleon theologies', changing colour according to the context, whereas mission is rooted in the 'untainted,' unchanging universal theology.[1] The one stresses systemic change, siding with the oppressed; the other calls for personal conversion and care of the poor in spirit.[2] Mission stresses one's identity in Christ, while contemporary theologies emphasize one's identity based on race, culture, social class or sex.[3] One brings a spiritual, inner peace, the other encourages revolutionary struggles in society. Contemporary theologies are accused of taking the Christ culturally captive, whereas mission portrays Christ captivating the hearts of individuals. Contemporary theologians have been criticized for 'reducing the gospel: for repackaging it, so to speak, in order to serve partisan purposes of social change'.[4] The goal of mission is portrayed as a unifying of the church, while contemporary theologies are accused of fragmenting what little unity the church has managed to achieve.[5] So what do they have in common? Nothing, or so it appears.

The question does seem to be appropriate: 'What *do* contemporary theologies and mission have in common?' Indeed, is mission even on the agenda of contemporary theologies, or are its participants so busy discovering and articulating who they are that the mission of God and the mission of the church are not even considered?

To respond to these questions, the approach followed will be to clarify first what is meant by the terms 'contemporary theologies' and 'mission'. After this foundational background, the second section will look at stumbling blocks to mission being central to contemporary theologies. The third section will focus on contributions mission can or does make to ensure the centrality of mission in contemporary theologies. The conclusion will tie together the discussion and suggest some modest proposals for further dialogue between mission and contemporary theology.

Defining Terms

Contemporary theologies

Moltmann has argued that Christianity is always struggling with its identity and relevance.[6] On the one hand, there is the need to continually discover our identity, who we are as Christians. How can one 'tell the old, old story' if the church is not sure what it is?

Classical theology (for there could be only one!) has shaped the Christian identity. It was an 'eternal' (*theologia eterna*), 'perennial theology' (*theologia perennis*),[7] applicable to all people at all times, and always in the same form. The mission of the church was embedded in this theology. Contextual theologies, on the other hand, focus on the need for relevance in the Christian faith. Contemporary theologies insist that 'culture, history, contemporary thought forms, and so forth are to be considered, along with scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression.'[8] What does it matter to tell the old, old story, if it does not speak to one's context?

The 1988 LWF document *Together in God's Mission* also deals with the dual emphasis on identity and relevance. In terms of relevance, it states: 'The mission of the church always takes place within specific, changing historical contexts and differing cultural situations, and therefore bears their marks.' The LWF statement was quick to add, however, that this emphasis on relevance was not to occur at the cost of identity. It stated, '[The mission's] continuity, however, is based on God's own activity in the world as revealed uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ and in the sending of the Holy Spirit.'[9] The 'story of Jesus and his love', on which one's identity is based, is the content of the story. The context, on the other hand, influences how the good news is relevant. It allows one to sing 'Jesus loves *me*' here in this time and in this place.

The Small Catechism of Luther is an excellent example of the need in theological endeavours for both identity and relevance. In his explanations of the Ten Commandments, the Creeds and the Lord's prayer, for example, Luther follows the pattern of first naming our identity as given in these identifying statements, and then follows this up with a discussion about their contextual relevance by asking 'What is this?' What is this for life? What relevance does this have in my context? Contemporary theologies follow a similar pattern. They attempt to make one's identity as a child of God relevant to their specific context. Each contemporary theology considered in this paper attempts to affirm the identity of a group of people as the people of God in ways that are relevant to a specific context. In this sense, it is more appropriate to refer to them as contextual theologies than contemporary theologies. Contemporary theologies are always being developed, but not all would fit the criteria of speaking to a specific context.

The contextual theologies in this paper fall into three basic categories: liberation theologies, feminist theologies and ecotheologies. Liberation theologies from Asian, African and Latin

American contexts wrestle with what the gospel means for life in the face of economic, social and other injustices. Black, African-American, Dalit, Minjung, Rainbow and other aboriginal theologies have developed in response to the question, 'What is the good news of the gospel in the midst of the oppression of a group of people because of race, politics and social status?' Feminist, womanist and gay–lesbian theologies wrestle with what it means to be people of God in political, social and ecclesiastical structures that are biased in terms of patriarchal, gender, and sexual orientation. Ecotheologies raise questions about what it means to be caretakers of God's creation, as they address the very relevant concerns of the injustices done to the earth at the hands of a technological society.

Mission

Mission witnesses to the world of the in-breaking realm of God. The 1988 LWF statement on mission theology states, 'The ultimate goal of this divine mission is the establishment of the reign of God in its fulness at the end of time'.[10] This suggests that evangelism and acts of service, for example, are not the goal of mission. Rather, they are ways in which mission is carried out. Moreover, it is proposed that mission is carried out in three basic ways: proclamation, acts of service, and the doing of justice.

Proclamation is often better known as evangelism. Proclamation moves away from the idea, often associated with evangelism, of trying to convince, by hook or by crook, someone to think in the same way as the evangelizer. Proclamation suggests telling a story, rather than arm-twisting. It also suggests a trust that the Holy Spirit who 'calls, gathers and enlightens' will do just that. Proclamation is rooted in Jesus's instructions in Matthew 28:18–20 and Acts 1:8–11.

In some circles the term 'mission' is interchangeable with the term 'evangelism'.[11] In other circles, mission was when one crossed the seas to tell the story to the 'noble savages' (as early missionaries to Canada described it); while evangelism meant proclaiming the gospel to the lapsed and uncommitted within the boundaries of the local church.[12] In either case, the gospel proclaimed was seen as a timeless, eternal story which cuts across all cultures and transcended all contexts.

Mission is more than a proclamation. One cannot simply proclaim good news when a person is hungry, and there is bread to share. Mission involves acts of service, such as relief work, education and health care. Acts of service are signs of God's realm. They show the good news, not just talk about it. Acts of service are as much a part of carrying out mission as is proclamation. Both are needed, and both need to work together. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) gives a classic example of this call to service.

Occasionally, acts of service replaced the proclamation of the word altogether. If people saw a person's good deeds, it was assumed that they would eventually ask that person why they did these things. The appeal of this is that everyone could be involved in 'mission'. All were 'secret

servant missionaries'. Mission personnel no longer felt the need for theological training before they served on the mission field. Their own gifts were recognized. The missionary theme song, 'I love to tell the story', was replaced in this case with the hymn, 'We have no mission but to serve'.[13]

Justice has often been overlooked as a part of the mission of the church. Yet it has strong biblical precedents. Amos 5:24 reminds us to 'let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream'. And Micah 6:8 says, 'He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' This justice was a declaration of God's grace to both those inside and outside of the gathered community, and it called for transformations of individuals, values and society. A justice which transforms is a sign, once again, of the in-breaking reign of God.

North American Christians have been hesitant to involve themselves as disciples by 'doing' justice. It sounds too political, especially when it calls for transformations of society. Moreover, North American society benefits from injustices. Yet acts of justice are signs of God's realm, and thus a part of mission. One of the most basic messages God had for the people concerned doing justice. Worship and sacrifices were considered worthless if the people were not doing justice.

When Jesus preached for the first time in his home synagogue, he read from Isaiah, announcing that he had been anointed to 'bring good news to the poor ... proclaim release to the captives ... the recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' (Luke 4:18–21). In this announcement, proclamation, service and justice are all involved. Jesus did not just proclaim the good news, he actually lived it, so that people might see God's realm breaking in upon the world. In this sermon Jesus gave to his home congregation to inaugurate his mission, he

> gave us the agenda not only for evangelism but for the whole Christian church: 'good news to the poor (that is, the economically disinherited) ... release to the captives (the socially and politically disinherited) ... recovering of sight to the blind (the physically disinherited) ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed (the morally and spiritually disinherited) ... to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (a new beginning on a world scale).'[14]

Stumbling Blocks

From these definitions, it is clear that if mission involves only proclamation and acts of service, then mission is not central to contextual theologies. If, however, mission includes justice, then mission is central to contextual theologies. The real question to ask, then, is what stumbling blocks hinder mission from being, not just central, but at the heart of contextual theologies? The extent to which mission studies and practices address these stumbling blocks may determine how central mission is in contextual theologies.

Proclamation and culture

One stumbling block for contextual theologies is proclamation or evangelism. Mission has often been saturated with the culture of those sending the missionaries. The sending culture was wrapped up with the message itself. The sending context – the culture, values and agendas of the sending countries and agencies – influenced the content of the proclamation. Thus, the proclamation reflected the culture and values of the sending nation mixed in with the proclamation of the gospel. An early missionary to central Canada recognized this in his report to the sending agency: 'I thought of making the Red Men Christians, and then Christians and Englishmen were so closely united in my imagination, that they appeared as one. Consequently I expected that when the Red Man became a Christian, we would see all the virtues of English Christians immediately developed in his character.'[15]

Generally, however, the missionaries did not make a distinction between the culture and the gospel proclamation. Based on the conception that the sending culture was a superior culture – for after all, they had the gospel! – the actual context in which the message was proclaimed was considered irrelevant. Although the message was considered timeless and transcending of all contexts, it had already been contextualized by those who proclaimed it. The gospel was wrapped up in the package of the missionary's culture. When the gospel was shared, the wrapping often appeared as attractive as the gift itself.

When proclamation or evangelism was blended with the culture of the evangelist, it became what Mollenkott defined as patriarchal evangelism. As she defines it,

> Patriarchal evangelism is a style of evangelism that has accepted many of the destructive assumptions of traditional western culture: that bigger is better, so that evangelism's purpose is to enlarge Christian institutions; that competition is necessary and desirable even in the life of the church; that human fulfilment stems chiefly from measurable achievements; that Christians should strive to transcend the condition of ordinary humanity; that at the same time Christians must properly remain in a state of small-child dependency upon a God-Out-There; that salvation is personal and perhaps justice-oriented, but is certainly not intended to challenge the current structures of society; and that some people (such as evangelists and other clergy) are in a special position of authority that gives them the inside track on God's intentions, so that others must assume a position secondary to themselves.[16]

This criticism is not just directed at mission practices. Feminists and womanists have suggested that contextual theologies are themselves patriarchal. As a result, women have faced discrimination in their attempts to get an equal voice even at EATWOT (Ecumenical Association

of Third World Theologians). One woman lamented that one would have expected that among liberation theologians, women would find 'refuge for the weak, poor and downtrodden', and asked, 'Is working together possible when there is no equality among women and men?'[17]

Emphasis on other-world salvation

Bosch notes that 'the church's missionary involvement suggests more than calling individuals into the church as a waiting room for the hereafter.'[18] Proclamation offered 'eternal life-insurance policies', which had no relevance in the present. They became relevant only at death. Salvation focused more on being saved from hell after death than on discovering life now and in the future. 'The overriding purpose of mission here ... is the preparation of people for the hereafter, ensuring for each a safe passage to heaven.'[19] Sun Ai Lee Park described the message as 'The kingdom of God is some place where the souls of the godly go after death; it has nothing to do with life in this world, except for the cause and effect relationship in reaching heaven after death.'[20] Those who benefited from this understanding encouraged the emphasis on God's realm being possible only after death. But their attempts at suppressing signs of God's in-breaking did not always work. For example, many of the spirituals of Black and African-American theologies, such as 'Swing low, sweet chariot, coming for to carry me home', appeared to proclaim only a future freedom. The slave-owners, when hearing these songs, would not be threatened. Yet these apparently 'future-oriented spirituals' were also present-tense oriented, a sort of code way of expressing the slaves' hopes for freedom and an abundant life in this world. Heaven often meant Canada or the northern United States, where slavery was less prevalent.[21]

When salvation is future-oriented, proclamation becomes isolated from justice.[22] Proclamation without justice only hides the coming reign of God breaking into the world. Bosch states it well:

> Whenever the church's involvement in society becomes secondary and optional, whenever the church invites people to take refuge in the name of Jesus without challenging the dominion of evil, it becomes a *countersign* of the kingdom. It is then not involved in *evangelism but counter-evangelism.* When compassionate action is in principle subordinated to the preaching of a message of individual salvation, the church is offering cheap grace to people and in the process denaturing the gospel. The content of our gospel then is – in the devastating formulation of Orlando Costas – 'a conscience-soothing Jesus with an unscandalous cross, an otherworldly kingdom, a private, inwardly spirit, a pocket God, a spiritualized Bible, and an escapist church'.[23]

In the future-orientation of salvation, acts of service become band-aid solutions. They do not address the injustices which caused the problem in the first place. They were often used merely as tools for evangelism, to 'dispose people favourably to the gospel, "soften them up", and prepare them for the work of the *real* missionary, namely the one who did evangelism'.[24] Acts

of service were not to distract missionaries from doing their true work.[25]

There was also a temptation to use acts of service to ensure eternal salvation for oneself, rather than simply because a neighbour was in need. This problem, though, has been around as long as the church itself. Helping the poor in need was a way for the rich to obtain eternal life. A medieval sermon stated, for example, that 'God has ordered that there be rich and poor so that the rich may be served by the poor, and the poor may be taken care of by the rich'. The poor are given their lot in life so that 'the rich might enter eternal life through them'.[26]

Hermeneutics

Mission has tended to follow a 'linear' hermeneutic, which begins with the authority of the Bible, and then applied it universally. The starting point was the mandate to 'Go and make disciples' and the end point was building churches, often on the pattern of the sending culture. This is a hermeneutic of progression. It does not take into consideration the experience or context of the people that are the objects of mission. It provides no opportunity for reflection on the process, the content of the message and the changing context of the community.

Contextual theologies, on the other hand, generally operate on the model of a hermeneutical circle. The hermeneutical circle is not dependent upon an elitist model, where the person's academic training in scripture is relied upon to bring a knowledge-based interpretation to the community. Instead, the common starting point of one's experience in the context gives a validity and authority for all in the community to read and interpret scripture from their particular context. Of course, there are always concerns raised about the starting point of experience in the hermeneutical circle. The focus on experience and the context appears to detract from the universality of the gospel. Coe asks if, in the emphasis on the context, 'is there ... a danger of losing the catholicity of the Gospel? To this there is a counter question: Is there such a theology which is not *in loco* and thus *in vacuum?* A *theologia sub specie aeternitatis,* as it were – a utopian theology? But the concern for the catholicity of the Gospel is a legitimate one, with which contextualizing theology is deeply concerned. And contextualization, I believe, is the authentic way to that catholicity.'[27] Contextual theologies remind mission that one must focus not just on the catholicity of the gospel (the content), but also on the context of the proclaimers.

In the linear hermeneutical model, there are imbalances in the relationship between the provider and recipient of mission. The proclaimer and provider is the active agent for change, and the recipients are the passive objects to be changed. Professionals bring Christ to people (a progression), rather than the community discovering Christ already present in their context. The professionals, and those with the resources to become professionally trained, had authority over those who did not have the academic training or resources. In this way, suggests Pannell, evangelism become a part of a 'middle-class function'.[28] The professional, who 'knew the formulas' and correct dogma, and who could couch it in the right philosophical jargon, had control over those without such training. Moreover, the experience and knowledge of the

professional were recognized, but not the experiences of the rest of the community. The community was treated as a 'blank slate', empty people ready to be filled up with the correct knowledge given by the professional.

Contextual theologies question this dichotomy between ministry by professionals as opposed to mission by all the baptized. They call for a shift from mission 'done' by professionally trained ministers to mission done by those who are willing to be involved in their own context, regardless of their training.[29] Mission and theology must be the collective effort of the community rather than the professional effort of one or two.[30] And when the goal of mission is to point to God's signs and in-dwelling presence in a particular context, then the whole paradigm of mission shifts. Mission is no longer something that just happens overseas by professionals bringing 'Christ to the nations', as if God wasn't already present. Doing mission and theology happens in each local neighbourhood and congregation, involving all the baptized, as they discover and point to signs of God's presence in their midst. The church in mission, then, is 'primarily the *local* church everywhere in the world'.[31]

Progress is also central to a patriarchal, linear hermeneutical model.[32] This emphasis on progress is a part of the traditional sending culture of missionaries. 'Modern Western civilizations are one-sidedly programmed for progress, development, growth, expansion, conquest and gain.'[33] They think that bigger is better, for it allows society to overcome boundaries. Hall, a contemporary North American contextual theologian, has argued that his society thinks it must achieve progress at all costs, but that the myth of progress is bankrupt.[34] Technology is used as a sign, a proof that society is getting better, but the down side of technological progress has been the destruction of the environment and an ever-increasing gap between the rich and the poor.

Mission practices often tried to measure progress through attendance and baptismal records and by how many churches were 'planted'. Marlene Perera, a missionary in Sri Lanka, states that generally, the mission 'vision was to implant the church' rather than being signs of God's in-breaking realm.[35] If mission is about progress, measured by new church buildings and church growth, then it has little room for 'Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation'.[36] If growth, rather than noting signs of God's realm, is the goal of mission, then justice, so central to the concerns of contextual theologies, can sometimes get in the way of growth. When justice is not done, for fear of scaring off members and potential members who are satisfied with the status quo, there is something amiss with mission. Justice is often a costly part of discipleship, for it upsets the status quo. Using progress as the measure of mission is a theology of triumphalism. There is then no place for God's solidarity with any oppressed group, unless that group shows signs of progress.

Contextual theologies call for a shift from the image of progress to an understanding of mission as solidarity with people in their context. It is a shift from a theology of glory to a theology of the cross; from a Constantinian model of mission to a 'remnant' theology of mission. At the heart of the new paradigm is the incarnation; God's sign of presence with all who are marginalized,

who cannot make 'progress' according to society's standards. Jesus was not a sign of God's incoming realm because of the 'progress' he made; he was a sign of God's in-breaking realm by his presence. The incarnation was a sign of God's commitment to be present with people in suffering and a groaning creation.

Contextual theologies do not settle, however, for a sanitized version of the incarnational presence, which is so often docetic and insulated from the real world of struggles and oppression. They push the incarnation as a sign of God's presence with the marginalized, and highlight its radical implications. For example, the image of a 'Black Christ' portrayed by Cone,[37] the 'Crucified Christa' in New York City or the statue of the 'Crucified Woman' in Toronto,[38] make definite statements about God's incarnational presence among the marginalized. They are signs of a realm of God where the crucified Christ has fully identified with a marginalized people, as well as what society wants to do with those who dare call for God's reign to become flesh in this world. The incarnation is not a sign of progress at the expense of justice, but a sign of God's presence where justice reigns.

Individualization

Contextual theologies raise concerns about the general focus upon individualization. The goal of mission is often interpreted as the conversion of individuals. But contextual theologies also call for the conversion of the church and society. Churches and societies are also ensnared in sin, including the sins of patriarchy. Altmann notes that 'justification by faith (and only by faith) unmasks the ecclesiastical demands with which the church stops being an instrument of salvation and transforms itself into another system of domination.'[39] Church and society must be 'born again'.[40] The earth, the church and society itself is 'an object of the *missio Dei*, in constant need of repentance and conversion; indeed all traditions today subscribe to the adage *ecclesia semper reformanda est.*'[41]

Nor can mission be a matter of either/or: the conversion of the individual or the conversion of society. Fackre describes it this way:

> Evangelists may adopt the language of liberation but mean by it personal liberation from sin and guilt. Liberation is indeed deliverance from sin and guilt by the pardon and power of God in Christ. But standing alone this is a reduced gospel from which is absent the Good News of deliverance, at Exodus and Easter, from bondage to the principalities of this world, and the call to 'resist the powers of evil'.[42]

Contextual theologies argue that with the focus on the individual, mission often lacks a critical analysis of the structural roots of sin. Along with the emphasis on the personal nature of conversion and salvation comes a personal view of sin. Liberation is restricted, as Fackre noted, to liberation from sin and guilt. What is missing, however, is the recognition of the corporate

aspects of sin, conversion and *shalom*. Patriarchy, the abuse of God's creation in a systemic way, and the various forms of oppression, are more than the sum of individual sins. They reflect the fact that the systems and ideologies by which society operates support the sinful ways in which humans interact with God, others and God's creation. Liberation frees communities of people from systems of bondage. It is not just about setting individuals free from their own sin and guilt.

Basic Concerns About Contextual Theology

Mission is central to contextual theologies, in so far as mission involves justice. The question one needs now to address is what mission studies and practices can contribute to contextual theologies, so that signs of God's in-breaking reign remains the focus of attention. There are some very important and specific things which mission studies and practices can contribute, and need to continue to contribute to contextual theologies.

Purpose

While contextual theologies have rightly insisted on the inclusion of doing justice as a integral part of mission, mission also is right to raise with contextual theology the very basic question of purpose. Why is it important to include the fight for justice in mission? Why seek liberation from oppression? Why is it crucial for mission to uphold, and call for the care of God's creation? What is the agenda behind the understanding of mission as justice? Is justice sought because it is central to the mission of God, or because it is a worthy humanitarian project? If the proclamation is ignored, then do not the calls for justice lose a very central aspect of their purpose? From the perspective of mission, there is the temptation for contextual theologies to settle for justice as simply a humane thing to do.

While contextual theologies have argued that mission runs the risk of forgetting the context with the emphasis on the content or the proclamation, mission studies point out that contextual theologies run the temptation of forgetting the content or proclamation in the quest to be contextual. The traditional mission agenda, in terms of the content of its message, addressed concerns such as 'reason and revelation, faith and history ... and especially, "How can we *know* God?"' whereas contextual theologies, with a focus on justice, introduced a new question: 'how can we change the world?' and, in the case of ecotheology, 'how can we save the world from deterioration and destruction because of the ravages of pollution and the agenda of technological and economic progress at all costs?'[43] The pursuit of these new questions, while moving faith out of an intellectual and personal quest, can leave contextual theologies open to the charge of works righteousness. Works of justice and acts of service can become ends in themselves when isolated from the gospel message that is so central to mission. Justice without the word can become a theology of glory just as easily as the proclamation of the word without justice becomes a theology of glory and cheap grace. When proclamation is excluded from one's understanding of mission, then acts of service and justice end up being signs, not of the reign of God, but of human attempts to build a utopia on earth. Linn rightly notes that unless the fight for 'Justice, Peace, and

the Integrity of Creation' is seen as a mission concern, and from the perspective of mission, they will 'run the danger of relying too much on human efforts and activities'. The proclamation 'does not announce anything that *we are bringing about* but draws people's attention to what God has brought about and is still bringing about.'[44] The LWF document *Together in God's Mission* states it this way: 'Word without deed falsifies the very word itself as it makes the gospel abstract and denies God's transforming power in creation and in incarnation. The failure to accompany witness through word by witness through life may close the door to the gospel. On the other hand, the deed without the word is in danger of degenerating into sheer humanitarianism and conformity with the context and of failing to convey the fulness of salvation as God's gift.'[45] The 1980 WCC statement *Mission and Evangelism* stated,

> There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God's promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility test: a proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice.[46]

When the proclamation of the word, the 'telling the story', is forgotten and acts of justice become an end in and of themselves, there is nothing to distinguish contextual *theologies* from contextual *ideologies*. When this proclamation of Christ's life, death and resurrection is no longer proclaimed, a contextual theology ceases to be Christian.

In contextual theologies, there is also a tendency for proclamation to be replaced by declaration. These declarations dwell more on the injustices and abuses occurring at the hand of the rich, white North American male than on the proclamation of the coming reign of God. To follow the traditional law/gospel dichotomy, the declarations of contextual theologies are spoken as laws demanding change and conversion of the oppressors, and the proclamation of the gospel is reserved for the 'insiders'. The great tradition of proclamation, despite its flaws and the unwarranted additions to it in the history of mission, is something mission needs to hold before contextual theologies so that the gospel, this grace-filled proclamation, is not replaced with declarations of law.

It is easy for mission and contextual theologies to forget that the church sculpted in one's own image is not the same as the realm of God; even if they are base communities, the woman church, the 'Discipleship of Equals' in a 'critical ekklesia-ology of liberation',[47] or an evangelistic mission church. They 'display to humanity a glimmer of God's immanent reign', but the church in any of these forms is not the realm of God.[48] Mission would do well to remind the communities which are building their own utopias on earth that there is a difference between being a sign of God's realm and assuming they are God's realm incarnate.

Humanity

Mission studies need to explore the important theme of 'humanity' in contextual theologies. The need for liberation of people from inhumane systems and contexts is a very basic issue of justice, and the gospel for such a context surely includes the humanization of people. Domingo Diel Jr. describes the Asian scene in 1985 as one of 'suffering and violence in many forms and in different intensities. It is the suffering of people, individually and collectively. It had dehumanized millions under its clutches and made them vegetate under conditions beyond description.'[49] What he said of his context can be repeated, with slight variations, by many of the proponents of contextual theologies. The cry for freedom of African-Americans subjected to the slave trade and economic and cultural slavery today, the oppression of the *campesinos* in Latin America, the abuse of 'military comfort women' in Korea, and the degradation of whole classes of people – all cry out for a chance to be treated as fully human, and to discover their own humanity.

The humanization of those who are treated as less than human is certainly something that must be addressed as a basic issue of justice and thus mission. The idea of mission as humanization was central to the WCC Assemblies in Uppsala (1968) and Bangkok (1973). The North American working group report on 'The Missionary Structure of Congregations', which went to the 1968 Assembly in Uppsala, stated, 'We have lifted up humanization as the goal of mission because more than the others it communicates in our period of history the meaning of the messianic goal'.[50] The need to liberate people from dehumanizing conditions is one of the very integral aspects of mission. That is a given.

However, mission studies may ask whether the whole goal of mission for contextual theologies, with their emphases on justice, is humanization. Gibson Winter, for example, argues, 'Why are men not simply called to be human in their historical obligations, for this is man's true end and his salvation.'[51] From this perspective, the goal of mission is to simply assist people in becoming fully human. All that matters is the attainment of a full life in this world. Moltmann-Wendel echoes this in stating that the 'goal of theology is human worth, the possibility of being a person within a just order of society'.[52] In liberal theology, 'mission' is often replaced with 'humanization'.[53] So what is wrong with this? John R. W. Stott responds:

> Humanization, development, wholeness, liberation, justice: let me say at once that all these are not only desirable goals, but that Christians should be actively involved in pursuing them, and that we evangelicals have often been guilty of opting out of such social and political responsibilities. ... But these things do not constitute the 'salvation' that God is offering the world in and through Christ. They could be included in the 'mission of God,' insofar as Christians are giving themselves to serve in these fields. But to call socio-political liberation 'salvation' is to be guilty of a gross theological confusion.[54]

Stott raises concerns here about contextual theologies' humanization agenda. The end goal of mission, namely the realm of God, is replaced with the goal of becoming fully human. True, it can be argued that participation in the reign of God does make people fully human, but a focus on being human does not always include an awareness of or commitment to the reign of God. The very name 'contextual theologies' reminds one that they are theologies; that the ultimate focus is, or ought to be, on God. Otherwise, it would be better to name them contextual agendas for humanization. Pope Paul VI argued that 'there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel.'[55]

Liberating people to become fully human is not the end in itself; rather, it is to be a sign of God's realm breaking in upon the world. Schreiter proposes that mission must be a '*theological* discourse'.[56] The basic question mission asks of contextual theologies is: where does the 'mission of God' fit into the picture? Is it sidelined in the pursuit of the mission of humanity? The ultimate goal of mission, liberation and justice is God's reign, not humanization. Humanization may be the penultimate goal, but it is not to be the final goal. A Roman Catholic nun summarizes this concern well: 'Mission that starts with the experience of the poor has three concerns: human dignity, relationships and community. Its ultimate goal is the fullness of God's reign.'[57]

Eschatology

Another concern mission should raise with contextual theology about the emphasis on humanization involves eschatology. An emphasis on humanization may succumb to the temptation of reducing one's eschatological perspective from the now/not yet dichotomy to an exclusive focus on the present. Mission needs to temper contextual theologies so that the now/not yet emphasis is preserved. A holistic view of mission reminds contextual theologies that proclamation, acts of service, and justice are *signs* of the realm of God, and not the realm of God itself, breaking into this world. The quest for humanization is not an end in itself; it only gives the world a glimpse of God's realm. The Asian theologian Diel argues that contextual theologies 'should not ... arrogate to themselves the promise to bring the kingdom of righteousness and freedom after the struggle – that would be triumphalism coming in the back door.'[58] Pope Paul VI also expressed concerns about the loss of a now/not yet eschatological tension in liberation theologies. He stated that those involved in the 'liberation effort are frequently tempted to reduce her [the church's] mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. They would reduce her aims to a man-centred goal; the salvation of which she, as the messenger, would be reduced to material well-being.'[59] These reminders of the boundaries and limits of attempts to bring in human-conceived utopias are important for contextual theologies. The now/not yet dichotomy needs to be preserved. Liberation movements 'tend to forget that ultimately the cause is transcended by God's cause of eschatological mission', and thus may tend to focus 'only on mobilization of people for a particular cause'.[60] This 'realized' eschatology bought in by human efforts is in reality only a foretaste or a sign of the full reality of the realm of God as God intended it to be.

Abundant life

The concerns contextual theologies have for humanizing the world, becoming care-givers of creation rather than its abusers, and the focus on a realized eschatology raises the question of what life is about. A dehumanized life is not life as the creator intended it to be. An abundant life which will be realized only in the future appears as a cruel joke to those who are suffering in the present. Life is not primarily about catering to the consumerism of a small economic elite. Nor is it about gaining power over others or creation through technologies and biased ideologies which rely on treating others as less than human in order to obtain this power. Contextual theologies are absolutely right in calling into question such injustices and abuses which take life from people and from the earth. These injustices and abuses destroy relationships. Conversions must occur in how communities and societies live in relationship to other communities. Reflecting on ecology, Linn argues that

> it is also obvious that we need a radical change in our attitude towards nature – what amounts to a conversion experience. As soon as we use the word 'conversion' we are talking about mission. That's what mission is about: to invite all human beings to conversion, to turn to the living God and to turn away from idols. So the mission concern related to stewardship of creation might well be to discern the idols of our time, to unmask them and to show how one can be liberated from the captivity of worshipping them.[61]

Contextual theologies, however, have often defined the abundant life only in terms of external factors. One's relationship with the community and the creation, based on the single criterion of justice, is the measurement used to define life. As Maimela argues, 'sins such as poverty, injustice, oppression, hatred, racism, denial of freedom, and other forms of socio-political structures ... put people at odds with their neighbours', concluding that 'sin is a fundamental state of alienation that is the root cause of the situation of injustice and oppression, as well as the root cause of self-centredness, isolation and denial of fellowship.' These sins of injustice take away from life by destroying one's horizontal relationships. But what about one's vertical relationship with God? Mission practices have insisted that this vertical relationship is also an integral ingredient to the abundant life. Without this relationship, no matter how just one's horizontal relationships are, there is still a hollowness to life.

The emphasis in contextual theologies of the incarnation, of 'God-with-us', reflects something about the vertical, and not just horizontal, relationship with God in community. The abundant life is possible because God is with people who are gathered in community. But the traditional emphasis of mission proclamation, of 'God-for-us', which insists that the abundant life is made possible when God transforms individuals and communities, must also be stressed. A God who dwells with those who are oppressed but is helpless to transform the situation – or help people to have hope when transformation doesn't happen according to their timetable – is a God who cannot give the abundant life.

Mission ought to address whatever takes away from life, and which restricts salvation to the future. But mission also ought to ask contextual theologies if the fullness of life is obtained simply by the presence of justice in all of one's relationships with others and creation, or whether the fullness of life is about *shalom*, that peace which is internal and external. An abundant life comes from the ability to both transcend and transform external contexts. An abundant life, mission insists, involves a vertical relationship with God, and not just horizontal relationships.

Context and 'praxis'

Mission studies raise valid questions of contextual theologies concerning praxis and context. Where does one begin? Does one begin with contextual theologies' starting point of praxis in one's context? Or does one begin with the traditional mission starting point of the 'word'? Beginning with the word is often viewed as an attempt to impose a foreign system upon the context. Yet this same word has often informed and shaped society's values and sense of what is just, and what is 'wrong' with the context. The traditional mission emphasis on starting with the word or the gospel prevents the context from being the ultimate authority. The tendency for contextual theologies to root authority in the experience of oppression may replace the mission approach of experiencing the self and one's society from the perspective that comes from finding self and community in the presence of God. '[Praxis] is not to be taken as the sole and basic authority for theological reflection. Praxis can mean too many things. ... For this reason praxis needs the critical control of theory – in our case, a critical theology of mission, which is dependent upon the context without, however, elevating operational effectiveness to the highest norm.'[62]

Mission studies serve to remind contextual theologies that 'to take the context seriously does not necessarily mean ... taking all contexts equally seriously, because not all are equally strategic for the *Missio Dei* in the working out of [God's] purpose through history.'[63] Beginning with praxis can make everything relative to that particular context rather than to the realm of God. Bosch argues that with relativism, each theology 'forges its own theology, tailor-made for that specific context.'[64] 'This danger – the danger of relativism – is present not only in the Third World but also, for instance, in Western historical-critical biblical scholarship. ... We therefore – along with affirming the essentially contextual nature of theology – also have to affirm the universal and context-transcending dimension of theology.'[65]

Studies in mission have a valid point about the emphasis of contextual theologies to take the context seriously. Relativism is a danger. But there is also the danger of the 'absolutism of contextualization' which means 'universalizing one's own theological position, making it applicable to everybody and demanding that others submit to it. If Western theology has not been immune to this tendency, neither are Third World contextual theologies.' The result is that a 'new imperialism in theology then simply replaces the old.'[66]

Conclusion

Perhaps the only way to avoid all the pitfalls of mission studies uninformed by contextual theologies and contextual theologies uninformed by mission studies is to focus on what the gospel and God's realm are about. Such a question keeps mission from being only a matter of evangelism, good works, saving souls for heaven and church building. That question also keeps contextual theologies from focusing only on the present building of human realms or subtlety becoming works righteousness, where everything depends on humanity. The *missio Dei* involves the triune God affirming life through creation, incarnation and spirit. The mission task is to proclaim this life in its wholeness as sure and certain signs of God's realm breaking in on this world in specific contexts. The report of the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975 declared that

> The Gospel is good news from God, our Creator and Redeemer. ... The Gospel *always* includes the announcement of God's Kingdom and love through Jesus Christ, the offer of grace and forgiveness of sins, the invitation to repentance and faith in Him, the summons to fellowship in God's Church, and command to witness God's saving words and deeds, the responsibility to participate in the struggle for justice and human dignity, the obligation to denounce all that hinders human wholeness, and a commitment to risk life itself.[67]

If mission is to be central to contextual theologies, there needs to be simultaneously an emphasis on proclamation, acts of service and the doing of justice. Neither mission nor contextual theologies can collapse the simultaneous now/not yet of eschatology into an emphasis on either the future alone or the present alone. Mission can be central to contextual theologies when there is simultaneously an emphasis on the content of the gospel and what it means in each specific context. Mission can find a central place in contextual theologies when there is a simultaneous concern for the interwoven relationships between God, the individual, the community and the earth itself. Mission can be central to contextual theologies when there is a simultaneous focus on the church as both institution and movement. Mission can be central to contextual theology if sin, conversion, atonement and salvation are seen simultaneously as personal and corporate. Mission can be central to contextual theology in so far as 'sin, forgiveness, power and powerlessness, exploitation and misery, the universal search for identity, the widespread loss of Christian motivation, and the spiritual longings of those who had not heard Christ's name' are simultaneously dealt with from the perspective of God's realm breaking in upon our world, not to deliver us from the world, but to dwell with us and transform this world through grace alone.[68]

Notes

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2 Gabriel Fackre, 'Liberation and Evangelization – Some Historical and Theological Footnotes', *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3, (April 1979), 58–9.

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4 Richard John Neuhaus 'Liberation Theology and the Captivities of Jesus', *Mission Trends No. 3: Third World Theologies*, 41–61; 43–5; 47; 53.

5 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 172.

6 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified Christ: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, translators (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 7–28.

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13 From verse 4 of 'The Church of Christ, in Every Age'. Text by F. Pratt Green. *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg; and Philadelphia: Board of Publication, 1978).

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15 William Cockran, report to the Secretaries of the Church Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society Records, Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada. August 8, 1836.

16 Virginia Ramsey Mollenkott, 'New Age Evangelism',33.

17 Dorothy Ramodibe, 'Recreating together the new Church in Africa', *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Dec. 1990), 42–53.

18 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 377.

19 Bosch, 'Mission in the 1990s', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 14 No. 4 (Oct.1990), 149–52; 151.

20 Sun Ai Lee Park, 'Asian Women in Mission', *International Review of Mission* 81 (April 1992), 265–80; 266.

21 James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 86–106.

22 A classic example of this is the Canadian story of a native who was visited by a missionary in hopes of converting him so that he might be fit for heaven when he died. The native, however, refused. As the missionary noted in his journal, 'He said in reply that all I told him was good but God was so great and holy and pure a being that he would never allow Indians to live with him, for when he went to the houses of European chiefs who had fine rooms they were never allowed to go further than the kitchen because they were not clean enough. If, then, they were not fit to live with men, how could they be fit to live with God?' Revd John Smithurst, *Journal*, Church Missionary Society Records, Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada. Entry for August 2, 1840.

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Globalization: Challenge and Opportunity for Mission

Choong Chee Pang

The Globe and Holistic Mission

It has been more than a decade since the term 'globalization' gained currency. The number of globalization theories and their expositions are often overwhelming and bewildering. Instead of dealing with the term as an abstract concept I should like to look at it rather concretely.

The globe as an inhabited planet

Scientists who are seriously engaged in space research have made some very remarkable discoveries in recent decades for which we ought to be grateful. Yet many questions and mysteries remain unanswered. So far, the *only* planet that is inhabited by humans and hosts of other living beings that we know for absolute certainty is our own – our globe, which is the 'earth' of our Christian confession: ' I believe in God the Father Almighty , Maker of heaven and earth'. But *this* globe, *this* earth, and not something else in remote outer space, is now universally acknowledged to be in great ecological crisis. This crisis must not be treated in isolation from other equally serious crises, crises which are socio-political and socio-economic as well as human and personal. All these crises are interrelated and interwoven, so that each is bound to affect the others directly or indirectly. As such, the 'curse' that was brought upon the earth because of Adam's sin (Genesis: 3:17) should no longer be regarded merely as poetic imagery or the language of myth. Unfortunately, it is neither poetic nor mythical, but very real and specific, just as human sinfulness and its many outward manifestations are real and specific. Isaiah and the other prophets of old clearly remind us of the vital link between sinful human behaviour and the pollution of the earth:

> Behold, the LORD will lay waste the earth and make it desolate,
> and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.
> The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled;
> for the LORD has spoken this word.
> The earth mourns and withers,
> the world languishes and withers;
> the heavens languish together with the earth.
> The earth lies polluted

under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed the laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse devours the earth ...
(Isaiah 24:1, 3–6; cf. Hos. 4:1-3; Jer. 12:4, 11)

The globe and social, political and economic systems

Our globe is not just a world of living beings; it is also a 'jungle' of multiple and complex structures and systems. Paradoxically, we human beings and other creatures are both served and enslaved by these structures and systems. One of the main reasons why environmental issues such as deforestation in Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia and China cannot be effectively dealt with is precisely because the structures and systems in these countries have been built, maintained, manipulated and selfishly exploited by people in high places.

It is also these structures and systems which control the media and people's freedoms – privileges, rights and luxuries which people in the North often seem to take for granted. In a recent regional television interview about ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) both the interviewer and I had to cope with a particular constraint which westerners would have great difficulty understanding, let alone appreciating and endorsing. This is the so-called 'principle of non-interference' which was adopted by ASEAN at its inception. This principle discourages (mildly put) or forbids (strongly put) member nations from interfering with the internal affairs of another member nation.

The globe, men and women

Globalization, modernization, industrialization, etc., mean that human society has become increasingly impersonal, resulting in the immersion of the individual man and woman in the mighty ocean of humanity. It is therefore of vital importance that we take the individual being – man, woman or child – personally and seriously in all our mission efforts. Here I have no new theology to offer except a return to the old biblical understanding of the *imago Dei* which should constantly remind us of the worth, dignity and freedom of the individual person created in the image of God. The individual person, despite their creatureliness and fallenness, is *still* the image bearer of the creator-God.

Two recent encounters with Chinese intellectuals reassured me that a sincere seeker can still find meaning and fulfilment in the one who is 'the ground of our being'.

A couple of months ago while lecturing at a university in China, I was introduced to a doctoral candidate who had just had a conversion experience. There was nothing particularly dramatic about her pilgrimage to faith: regular and private Bible reading and prayer, occasional participation in worship service in a local church near her university, etc. Then one Sunday, after a worship service, she returned to her university dormitory and the Holy Spirit simply convicted her of her sin and her need of Christ. She responded with a clear conviction and accepted Christ as her Lord and Saviour.

A good friend of mine from the same university was lecturing in Singapore as a visiting professor at a local university. His wife has been serving with an international organization in Europe with a very handsome income. She is accompanied by their two sons, who are studying in a noted European university. To many of their colleagues back in mainland China this is simply dreamlike. I was therefore most surprised when he recently confessed to me that he has been haunted lately by a rather mysterious kind of feeling – a feeling of sheer emptiness and meaninglessness. 'If I ever became a serious believer', he said, 'that religion must be Christianity'. And my response to him was: 'Well, my dear friend, I think you are not too far from the kingdom of God'.

The First Christian Mission in a Globalized World: Challenge and Opportunity

The complexity and extent of globalization today is certainly unprecedented in human history, but globalization had already occurred at the time of Christ in the Graeco-Roman world. Thanks to the favourable conditions and impressive facilities and infrastructure created by the *Pax Romana* and metropolitanism, the first Christian mission was able to reach out to most parts of the Roman empire in just a couple of generations. The first Christian missionaries were variously received, sometimes favourably as messengers of peace, but more often than not as 'Men who have turned the world upside down' (Acts 17:6). The story of this first Christian mission was one of confrontation: a tiny community of the faithful confronting one of the greatest empires in human history and emerging victorious. While Christians today are often too triumphalistic, romantic and nostalgic about this first Christian mission, we Lutherans seem to have forgotten this challenging and encouraging part of our history and heritage.

A Globalized Silk Road: Ancient and Modern

The ancient silk road

Not only was the Roman empire a very globalized world, there was also a globalized 'silk road' that linked China with the West via which Christianity, in the form of Nestorianism, came to

China in AD 635 during the T'ang Dynasty. It was also around this time that Chinese culture exerted its greatest influence on Korea and Japan, creating a Confucian or Sinic civilization much larger than today's geopolitical China and one which has to be taken seriously even today.

The modern silk road via Singapore Airlines

The caravans that travelled the ancient silk road brought China and the West together. The modern 'silk road' has been established and maintained by the wonder of modern air travel via Singapore Airlines and others (Singapore Airlines actually has a subsidiary called Silk Air!). Singapore Airlines alone has two daily flights from Singapore to Beijing. For about thirty years (1949–79) China was virtually closed to the outside world. But now, thanks to China's 'open door' policy, Beijing is only about a six-hour flight from Singapore. When China's door was first opened some twenty years ago, it could take as long as two hours to negotiate all the formalities on arrival at Beijing International Airport. It took only fifteen minutes on my last arrival – a record time for me. I leave it to your imagination to sort out the implications of this simple illustration.

Globalization and the Universalizing–Localizing Paradox

Although the term globalization began to gain currency only about a decade ago, the idea of the 'global village' had already been coined by the Canadian sociologist Marshall McLuhan in his 1960 publication *Explorations in Communication*. This is how the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the idea:

> *Global village*, a term popularized by M. McLuhan for the world in an age of high technology and international communications through which events throughout the world may be experienced simultaneously by everyone, so apparently 'shrinking' world societies to the level of single village or tribe ... hence globalism, internationalism, globalization, the act of globalizing, so globalized.

Anthony Giddens's definition of globalization in *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990) comes very close to McLuhan's global village:

> Globalization can ... be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.

Broadly speaking there are three main approaches to globalization: the socio-economic, the socio-political and the socio-cultural. Globalization has clearly increased interaction among people in the areas of trade, investment, media, tourism, electronic communication, etc. and hence universalized practically all major aspects of human life and activities. However, as Roland Robertson and others have rightly observed, the same globalizing process has also paradoxically increased people's civilizational, religious and ethnic self-consciousness. Malcolm Waters has described this strange phenomenon as the 'universalizing–localizing paradox'. J. A. Shad regards the global religious revival as the most evident example of such self-consciousness. Shad calls this 'the return to the sacred'.

Globalization: Asset or Liability?

Globalization is not always perceived as a blessing. Whether it is a blessing or a curse depends very much on what and where you are. The following news item from the United Nations which appeared in the *Strait Times* of Singapore in September 1998 with the title 'UN Chief Warns of Globalization "backlash"' is rather revealing:

> UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has warned of a 'backlash' from developing countries which fear that globalization is a tool of the industrialized North. ... He also said that 'through the developing world, the awakening to globalization's down side has been one of resistance and resignation, a feeling that globalization is a false god foisted on weaker states by the capitalist centres of the West'. He saw three main reactions by developing countries to globalization in what he described as 'a growing backlash': nationalism, a move towards 'illiberal solutions' with recourse to strong leaders, and politics of populism. He stressed that for globalization to succeed, 'it must succeed for poor and rich alike'. He called for democracy to be accepted as 'the midwife of development, and political and human rights must be recognised as key pillars of any architecture of economic progress'. Meanwhile, at the United Nations, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas complained that 'the concept of development as part of a multilateral support system has been replaced by the *laissez-faire* approach to the globalized economy'. Warning that 'the threat of a worldwide recession, even possibly a global depression, is real', he backed a proposal for a mechanism that would mitigate the 'dire effects' of globalization. Such a mechanism should monitor and carry out surveillance of capital markets and international financial organizations, he said. Mr Brian Atwood, the administrator of the US Agency for International Development, told the forum that 'the benefits still vastly outweigh the costs' of globalization, despite the recent economic downturn in Asia.

The 'Clash of Civilizations' and Christian Identity

Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University contributed a thought-provoking and controversial article to the 1993 summer issue of *Foreign Affairs*. He is also the director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, as well as the president of the Harvard Academy of International and Area Studies. He also served on the National Security Council under the Carter administration. It is therefore important not to regard him as a mere academician. In his 1993 article Huntington states:

> It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

According to Huntington's classification, there are seven or eight world civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic–Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilizations. Huntington expands on his hypothesis in a 1996 book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, in which the term 'Western' or the 'West' is used rather broadly or loosely as a synonym for 'Christian' or 'Christianity' minus the 'Slavic–Orthodox' civilization. By using 'the West' or 'Western Christendom' he has in fact deliberately or unintentionally confirmed or deepened the already common impression and prejudice in the non-Western world that Christianity is a western entity rather than a cross-cultural and universal religion. This immediately creates an identity crisis for Christians in the non-western world, especially in Asia, where virtually all major world religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam – have their roots. To which world civilization, for example, does a Chinese belong? Does he or she belong to the 'Sinic' or 'Confucian' civilization and feel comfortable with it? Strictly speaking, Chinese Christians will have difficulty identifying with Confucian civilization (although they can conscientiously subscribe to certain Confucian thinking, especially its ethics), because as a way of life the Confucian world view is essentially humanistic and self-sufficient. It admits no sin and is not aware of any need for salvation in the common religious sense.

It is generally understood that traditional Chinese culture or civilization actually consists of three major streams: Taoism, Confucianism and (Chinese) Buddhism. After nearly fifty years of continuous communist rule, one should perhaps even add Marxist–Leninist–Maoist ('Dengist')

to the three traditional streams of Chinese culture or civilization. The matter of civilizational identity then becomes even more difficult and complicated for the Chinese Christian, since Taoism and Buddhism are religious systems and communism is atheistic. The case becomes even more serious for Indian and Indonesian Christians, since Hinduism and Islam are both religions *and* civilizations.

Connectivity and Information Technology: Avoidance or Engagement?

The connectivity and immediacy that information technology has created for us today are absolutely incredible. I need only cite a couple of examples to remind us of its awesome and awful reality.

Those of us who watched the Gulf War will no doubt recall how war-game-like the whole thing was on television. Yet we *knew* it was real and the whole world was immediately divided by it – either for Iraq or for the allied forces. A neutral ground was hard to find.

I watched President Clinton speaking to students at Beijing University live on CNN in a room at the Hyatt Hotel in St Paul, Minneapolis in June 1998. As a visiting professor of that university for about ten years, I should have felt familiar with the things that appeared on the TV screen, but my initial response was one of utter strangeness and amazement. How could this nation, the largest on earth, which was almost completely closed to the outside world until quite recently, ever allow such a programme to be broadcast live within and outside China? The implications should not be too difficult to contemplate.

Watching television is a popular national entertainment in China, so the impact of the US Senate's live televised debate on the impeachment of President Clinton was enormous. It was a great opportunity for the Chinese and other peoples throughout the world to see how American democracy worked or failed to work.

A personal note

For reasons which I have yet to fully comprehend, I suddenly found myself a beneficiary of information technology. The story is a simple one. For quite a number of years now, I have been a judge of the International Intervarsity Debate (in Mandarin) sponsored by Central Television of China (CCTV) and the Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS). All the debate sessions were televised in full in both China and Singapore and were usually very popular. As such, I was sufficiently 'exposed' and the 'free publicity' I got so far worked to my advantage, so that Chinese academic institutions which organized public lectures for me needed only to advertise

me as a judge of the TV programme in order to draw a pretty good crowd. My last lecture attracted more than 300 people in a noted university in Beijing, when I spoke on religion and modernization. A regional television network based in Hong Kong and popular among the Chinese internationally did a personal profile on me and gave me the opportunity to state my Christian faith as well as my concern for the environment and interest in current affairs, the arts, etc. Thanks to the media and information technology!

Adam and Eve Where Are You?

The Genesis story is a very familiar one, but its familiarity must not be allowed to breed contempt. Behind this question there is the very core of mission; not the whole of it, since mission also has serious social and environmental concerns, but the *core* of it. Rebellious Adam and Eve were evidently overwhelmed by a deep sense of shame and fear. However, and this is most disturbing, many modern men and women who are alienated from God seem to have lost that vital sense of shame and fear in their lost condition. Our mission task is therefore, humanly speaking, a most difficult one. But thanks be to God, the Shepherd himself has already come and he will continue to seek out the lost through humble human vessels like ourselves.

The Voice of God in Other Nations[1] Indigenous Religiosity in Latin America as a Challenge for Christianity

L. Carlos Hoch

Introduction

Technical-scientific civilization is leaving its mark in the most remote areas of the world. Throughout the world[2] - be it among the Yanomami in the Amazon, the native people of the plains of Papua New Guinea, or the entire African continent - the territories of indigenous peoples are being reduced, militarized, ravaged and contaminated in the name of development, progress or national security. Western Christianity is an integral part of this invasion and oppression of ancient cultures. The speedy implementation of neo-liberal economic policies often leads to disorientation among members of indigenous cultures. Rapid modernization questions traditional means of production and, even more seriously, destroys traditional forms of social communion, including cultural and religious values.

Who are the indigenous peoples? The International Labour Organization defines indigenous peoples as 'ethnic groups within independent nations that are differentiated from the national community by their social, cultural and economic situation and that depend entirely or in part on their own customs and traditions or special laws'[3]. Estimates of the numbers of indigenous peoples vary between 250 and 300 million persons. The Decade for Indigenous Peoples, created by the United Nations, seeks to encourage respect for their intellectual and cultural heritage.

Within the last few years, Latin American indigenous populations have reflected vigorously on their own cultural values. This gives us reason to rejoice. Thus, representatives from various nations gathered in Guatemala sent an appeal to the European countries and churches: 'We can affirm that we are able to offer a world vision based on values that differ from those of the mercantilism and exploitation of the human being by other human beings and that follow different methods than those of economic growth and development through the destruction of mother nature.'[4] Considering the history of the continent, these words manifest a strong and perhaps surprising self-esteem.

The above text speaks of a different 'world vision'. It questions Europe and the European churches. Europe undertook what we in Latin America call the 'colonization of the conscience' and it may be that Europe has never really considered the possibility that indigenous peoples might possess a cosmic vision that deeply questions its assumptions. In the past, missionary

societies took on the task of preaching the gospel among the indigenous peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Did they take sufficient account of the cultural and religious traditions in these parts of the world? Did they allow these traditions to question them theologically?

We all know the answers to these questions. Today, we must acknowledge that some churches and mission societies have already begun doing these things. However, all of us find ourselves at the beginning of our reflection, the scope of which we are still not able to foretell. This applies to our churches in the Third World, as well as to churches in the northern hemisphere. Could it be that among the Adivasi in India, the Aymara in Bolivia and the Masai in the north of Tanzania and the south of Kenya there exists a 'world vision' that needs to be preserved, for the sake of these people and for the sake of humankind? To put it in theological terms, could God be trying to tell us proud Christians at the beginning of the third millennium something from the periphery of the world that up till now we have left unheeded? I should like to delve deeper into this issue and present some initial reflections from the perspective of the indigenous religiosity of Latin America.

The Need for Questioning

In August 1994 in Mato Grosso – 'where the waters that run to the north separate from the waters that run to the south'[5] – there took place the First Encounter on Indigenous Spirituality and the Christian Faith. Representatives from evangelical congregations and from the traditional spirituality of various indigenous peoples participated in this encounter. In the final joint declaration it was affirmed that there had hitherto never been a genuine dialogue between indigenous and Christian religions. Christian churches have never really permitted indigenous peoples to have their say. In that respect, however, this encounter was different.

Indigenous people claimed the right to have their cultural and religious difference recognized. They feared integration into Western culture and religious co-option. Antonio Guarani Nandeva, vice-chief of the Guarina village in Espirito Santo, expressed it this way:

> The ovenbird doesn't tell the song-thrush to make a house exactly like his or vice versa. ... When we get to know something, we learn to respect it. We do not accept the fact that Christianity wants to put only their wisdom in the village. We defend the right to decide up to what point we are going to accept that which comes from the outside. They should respect our culture as we respect theirs. ... We are creatures of God. God gave us culture, religion, language. ... We believe in what God gave us. ... God gave us wisdom just like in the Bible, except that it was not written. ... What the pastor says is doctrine, is written in the Bible. For us, wisdom is in the memory of the older ones as a trophy that is passed from generation to generation. If the people decide to let go of their culture, the Indian is the one who loses. God will get tears in his eyes. He will say: 'My children, the indigenous [natives] are

> letting themselves be fooled, they are losing the wisdom.' ... We believe that the Creator-of-all-the-peoples has a purpose for us as he places us on our feet and joins us in our resistance.[6]

In the final joint declaration the representatives came together over some issues. The medicine men declared: 'We the medicine men present declare that we never have refused the teachings of the Bible and the orientations given by Jesus, even when we suffered condemnation from the missionaries.' The evangelical pastors, on the other hand, committed themselves to 'ask God to continue guiding the medicine men and to give them more visions to guide our peoples in an ever better path.'

It seems to me that the Declaration of Pakuera is a document of historical importance because it comprises the first-ever dialogue of any significance between representatives of indigenous peoples and the evangelical churches in Brazil. In addition, it is important because indigenous people as partners in dialogue were accepted on an equal footing with evangelical Christians. At the same time, however, the Declaration of Pakuera raises some theological and cosmological issues. Are we Christians also able to recognize in the religion of indigenous peoples traces of God's will? Are we able to make the request made by the pastors *our* request, so that God may keep us from walking the wrong paths by means of the visions of indigenous peoples? Are we able to recognize the religious convictions of indigenous peoples as God's revelation without abandoning the foundation of our faith in Jesus Christ?

The complexity of this issue demands that we deal with it in stages. I shall describe a cosmological evaluation of indigenous culture, engage theologically with the issues mentioned and then reflect on them in missiological terms.

Creation Profaned

Many of us are familiar with the affirmation made by the North American Chief Seattle in 1854 in a speech before the governor of the state of Oregon: 'Each part of this land is sacred to my people'.[7] It is worth the effort to reflect briefly on the religious background to such an affirmation.

'Each part of this land is sacred': this means that God manifests Godhood in all of nature. God communicates through God's creation. In it, God's sanctity can be recognized.[8] 'As a mirror of holiness, the creatures are not', as is frequently thought, 'objects of adoration'.[9] The difference between creator and creature is maintained, but the interpenetration of creator and creature within indigenous religions is so great that it is believed that plants, animals, water and human beings are animated by the Spirit of God.

I was informed by a Christian theology which had distanced itself emphatically from all forms of interlacing of God and nature. This is why I soon reach my theological limits when it seems

to me that one has fallen into the danger of 'adoring the creature instead of the Creator', as the Apostle Paul said (Romans 1:25). Even so, I must admit that it is probably because indigenous peoples view nature as something sacred that they are able to relate to nature properly. The fact that they have attributed a divine nature to the natural world prevents them from treating plants and animals abusively as entirely subordinate to human beings and at their disposal. We, on the other hand, through our crass distinction between creator and creature, perhaps rely on a theological presupposition that permits an abusive exploitation of nature. When we profane nature or deprive it of soul we hand it over to the arbitrary intervention of human beings.

The real problem, however, is deeper. After expelling God from nature and daily life and by driving God far away, the path is clear to idolize as a 'greater good' the treasures that can be gathered and multiplied constantly through the exploitation of nature. As Mircea Eliade has indicated, by separating the sacred and the profane we have lost the notion of the religiously inaccessible aspect of things: nothing sacred is left for us. In this way, the so called profane can take the place of the sacred, and what has insinuated itself among us via the back door, so to say, is exactly that which we fight against in native people: the confusion of creator and creature as object of adoration. If indigenous peoples tend to see and worship God in everything that God created, we fall into the craziness of separating creation from God to such an extent that we worship what we obtain from creation, what we produce with our human hands. No one can persuade me that Western culture does not succumb to idolatry. Just look at the new forms it has taken in our time.

On the other hand, certain faith affirmations with which we are currently confronted in Latin America seem to me to be significant because they give new expression to important aspects of the theology of creation in our Judeo-Christian heritage which, in part, we have lost. Thus, for example, the Tupi-Guarani of Brazil believe in Curupira, a deity that protects the forest. This deity punishes all persons who destroy the forest arbitrarily. Curupira's punishment consists in the evildoers losing themselves so that they are unable to find their way back to the human community; in this way they become the victims of the forest they have damaged.[10] Does not this religious conception convey a prophetic message for our times: that nature will turn on those that destroy it? Is it so unreasonable to see in this statement of faith a common element with our faith in God, the creator of heaven and earth, who gave us the task of preserving creation?

As children of the Enlightenment we may be perturbed by the mythological language in which this affirmation of faith is couched. But how often does the Bible use figurative or even mythological language to express things that could not be expressed in other ways? One cannot talk about the divine except within the limitations of the language of a people and a certain period. Sundermeier speaks about the 'cultural clothes' of the gospel.[11] These cultural clothes are not the gospel itself, but the gospel did not 'come to the world "naked" in religious and cultural terms', and it maintains to this day something of its 'Jewish vestments'. Nowhere do we have God's word in its pure form. We have it only, as the Apostle Paul says, 'in vessels of clay' (2 Corinthians 4:7).

I should like to express my conviction that God, our creator, desires to be known by all people at all times as God of the universe and of history, and that for this to happen God has been revealed in all times and among all peoples in different ways, even if people have only recognized this in a fragmentary fashion. From the first lines of the Bible[12], then on through the Psalms[13] and into the New Testament[14], we read of God's marks in creation. At no time is any nation excluded from God's witness, including the indigenous people of Latin America. We cannot continue to believe that God created all persons in God's image and destined them for communion with God, but at the same time regard as lost all those who do not invoke God through the name of Jesus Christ. The German theologian Paul Suess, who lives in Brazil, states: 'No one culture is so important that it has received from God the exclusive privilege of God's incarnation. No one culture is so insignificant that God would not want to become fully flesh in it.'[15] What is the relationship between the witness of God among the nations and God's witness in Jesus Christ?

The Theology of Creation and Christology

Could it be that the command to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in all the world contradicts the conviction that God is also revealed among other peoples? I do not think so, because what God did in Jesus Christ relates to God's intention for us and all things since the creation of the world. However, in Jesus Christ the salvific action of God reaches its total and ultimate state of coherency. On the cross God was involved preeminently and to the fullest extent in the human condition. The resurrection of Christ maintains the continuing hope of overcoming all suffering. This is what we must preach. We do not intend to change this.

It is important that God's action in Jesus Christ should not be set against God's salvific action among the people of Israel or among other peoples; that the christological form of God's action should not be understood as if it contradicted God's universal salvific action. We cannot wish to believe that throughout millenniums the world was delivered to its own destiny or to strange powers and that only in Jesus Christ did God suddenly have a better idea and decide to intervene. God's action in Jesus Christ must be seen in continuity with God's action in the totality of God's history with people and the world. Precisely because we believe in Jesus Christ as the centre of God's revelation, we need to relate God's action in him with all that preceded it. If we do not do this, then we effectively pit God's action *before* Jesus Christ against God's action *in* Jesus Christ, creation *against* redemption, the first and second articles of our confession of faith. As Danish theologian Johannes Aagaard expressed it, we would be 'placing creation without salvation against salvation without creation'.[16]

Faith in the divine trinity does not *commit* us to listen carefully to God speaking through creation and to God's action through the Holy Spirit, but it makes it *possible* for us to do these things. If Jesus Christ is at the centre of God's revelation, then we need have no fear about God's speaking before him, after him and at his side. Conversely, the fact that Christians testify that Jesus Christ is the incarnated word of God does not give them the right to understand themselves as the only

administrators of God's mysteries in this world. We simply cannot do this because of the contradictory character of our testimony. In addition, even for Christians God always remains totally Other as regards all human conceptions of God.

Consequences for Mission

For many, the danger of what has been said up to now is that we might be led to abandon our unique faith in Jesus Christ, or else dilute it into something like a universal, generic religion. How can we, as Christians, understand other religions (like those of indigenous peoples, for example) and create a 'context for mutual communicative dialogue' without 'abandoning the identity of the Christian faith itself?'[17] In other words the mission must remain conscious of its dialogical character without, however, giving up faith in Jesus Christ. A genuine dialogical attitude does not entail abandoning the clarification and presentation of one's own position. Dialogue means 'letting oneself be known', becoming transparent to the other person in ways that can profoundly touch and move both partners.[18] This is certainly what the great African missiologist David J.Bosch meant when he said: 'Dialogue is the basic condition for a postmodern missiological paradigm'.[19]

There are at least two consequences of this dialogue. First, in the light of the witness of the holy scriptures, we can and should examine what our dialogue partner is testifying. We should not absorb uncritically what is communicated by representatives of indigenous religiosity simply because they are a threatened people. This would not be treating them with due seriousness as partners. Some religious notions and practices are incompatible with the biblical witness.

Second, we should not identify *missio Dei* with *missio ecclesiae.* The mission and preaching of the church are not the only means by which God spoke and continues to speak to people. We cannot take God to any place where God has not already been for a long time. The church participates in the *missio Dei*[20] but does not possess a monopoly on the word of God. God's action does not end with the action of the church. Not uncommonly God is obliged to act in this world against the church. Frequently – and here I am thinking especially of the dialogue with Judaism – our purpose should not be so much to convert the other as to purify and deepen what each partner brings as a contribution to the search for the truth of God.

Another consequence for the theology of mission relates to dialogue with indigenous religiosity and specifically to its prophetic component. I emphasize this point because often it has been left unconsidered in the history of mission. Just as I question certain aspects of the religiosity of Latin American indigenous peoples, so I must not avoid the questioning that arises for me personally from the encounter with their life and faith witness. I should not simply assume that their witness is the manifestation of powers hostile to God, who wish to turn me away from the true faith. I can remain open to the possibility that God might want to reveal something to me through them. It could be exactly the *otherness* of their discourse and their cosmology that grants me new insights into aspects of the Christian faith – insights that I may have forgotten or not sufficiently

emphasized. It may be that my faith is too narrow and too provincial, entangled in and coerced by my surrounding culture, so much so that I may not even be aware of it.

Within Christianity today there are isolated voices warning against the church's entanglement in the norms and values of non-solidarity that determine life in society. Perhaps God might wish to use the dissonant voice of those indigenous peoples who are not yet extinct or have not yet been integrated into the dominant culture to confront Christian churches and society as a whole with the monstrous idea that they may have taken the wrong path.[21]

In the Declaration of Pakuera representatives of Christian churches ask God 'to continue guiding the medicine men and to give them more visions to guide our peoples in a path that is ever better'. Listening to the *other*, such dialogue creates the opportunity for me to put the particularity of my Christian faith into the larger context of the universal action of God, which also includes the prophetic actions and discourse of God. If prophets are rare in our midst, God must make them arise from among other peoples. The Bible itself calls us to leave the door open to strangers, 'for with this some have taken in angels without knowing' (Hebrews 13:2). Angels are God's messengers; they show us new paths and bring us a message we might not otherwise hear.

Notes

1. Adapted from a speech proffered at the study day on 'World Mission' which took place in Neumünster, Germany, on 11 March 1995 and published in *Estudos Teologicos*, Sao Leopoldo 35 (2): 177-185, 1995.

2. This was pointed out in 1992 by historians and social scientists in a conference on "Global Civilization and Local Cultures", in Darmstadt. See Eine Welt und viele Kulturen, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, no. 171, 25 February 1992, p. 8.

3. Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), of 1989.

4. See Maurice Lemoine, Der Grosse Zorn der Indianer, E + Z, 33, 1992, p. 12. The statement was elaborated in October 1991 by 375 delegates from 35 different ethnic groups in the United States.

5. Declaration of Pakuera, published by the Council of Mission among Indians (COMIN) of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB).

6. These quotes are in a report of COMIN entitled 'I Encontro de Espiritualidade Indigena e Fé Crista no Contexto da Evangelizaçao Atual" written by Lori Altmann, a Lutheran pastor who participated as an invited observer.

7. This is the title (translated) of an essay by Theo Sundermeier, in his book *Aus einer Quelle schöpfen*, Gütersloh, 1992, pp. 49ff.

8. Ibid., p. 53.

9. Ibid., p. 55.

10. See Eduardo Hoornaert, *O Cristianismo Moreno do Brasil*, Petropolis, Vozes, 1991, p. 121.

11. Theo Sundermeier, *Wenn Fremdes vertraut wird; Predigten im Gespräch mit anderen Religionen*, Erlangen, 1994, p. 12.

12. Genesis 1:2b: 'And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters' testifies that there is no opposition between the presence of God in God's work of creation and God's work in Jesus Christ. Both witness to the grace of God which counts for all people.

13. I am thinking of Psalm 19:1, for example, which says 'The heavens are telling of the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.'

14. Colossians 1:6, for example, where it says that the gospel 'is in the whole world *(en panti to kosmo estin).*

15. 'Liberdade e Servidao', in Paulo Suess, *Queimada e Semeadura*, Petropolis, Vozes, 1988, p. 44.

16. *Die Zukunft des Christentums - wird es seine Identität verlieren?* Speech given at the Evangelische Akademie Nordelbien in Bad Segeberg on 4 March 1995 (manuscript).

17. Vu Kim Chinh, Zu einer Befreiungstheologie im chinesischen Kontext, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft,* Immensee, 49 (1): 22, 1993.

18. In Hans-Christoph Gossmann, *Zwischen Kirche und Moschee;* Muslime in der kirchlichen Arbeit, 1994, p. 105.

19. *Transforming Mission:* Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1993.

20. Roberto Zwetsch, correctly pointed this out in his essay Missao et Alteridade, *Estudos Teologicos,* Sao Leopoldo, 34 (2): 165ff., 1994.

21. Jürgen Lott formulated this idea in a similar way in a speech on the theme 'Pluralization of Vital Worlds' (manuscript), 1994, p. 15.

Koinonia and Mission

Monica J. Melanchthon

Koinonia and mission are words loaded with meaning. They have taken on different connotations in different periods of history, and have been ascribed different meanings and theologies in different contexts. Understanding the church as koinonia has become the central focus of efforts to formulate both confessional and ecumenical perspectives on ecclesiology. As for missiological issues, they have been discussed over and over again. All in all much has been said about these concepts. It is as if there is nothing more to be said about them. Maybe the focus needs to be shifted to implementation. However, I believe that there is value in repetition. The gospel of Jesus Christ is eternal. The task of presenting the gospel in the particular complexities of life in the world today demands the best of intellectual and spiritual efforts. So we need constant study, research into and interpretation of our identity and our missiological task. We need to meditate on this because the frontiers within which we live and are called to serve are constantly changing. The gospel is not time-bound, but we need to contextualize it.

I do not intend to take sides in the debate surrounding these two concepts. Rather, my task is twofold. First, to envision life lived within the communion by drawing on insights from our biblical and confessional roots. I do not understand this task as one of identifying the necessary structures for achieving communion, but rather as one of identifying the kind of life that typifies communion. Second, to determine how our identity as a communion informs our mission to a variegated and rapidly changing world. At the very outset I should like to say that we may be sure that our conceptions and our endeavours will be imperfect and to some degree inadequate for our times. History has taught us that the church's conceptions and endeavours have always been so. Yet we are not of course excused from struggling to make them as adequate and relevant as we can.

I should also like to make a slight methodological shift. Instead of beginning with koinonia and how we live it, I should like to begin instead with our missiological task and allow this to inform the manner in which we live in communion. In discussions of both koinonia and mission, more often than not, we have begun systematically from our own tradition. We like to establish those doctrinal presuppositions and parameters upon which we define our lives and ourselves, and then raise questions about other interpretations or models of church and mission. We are used to beginning with our own dogmas and theological traditions and seek to apply them in interpreting

and adjudicating between the various models of church or mission. Is it possible to reverse this process? Can we start with our praxis, and then in the light of that ask questions of our tradition and theology for the creative reformulation of life within the communion? This would in turn motivate and sustain further missiological praxis.

Transformation as Mission

The word 'transformation' is often used by secular NGOs, which see their task as one of transforming the structures or communities within which they serve. The American Heritage Dictionary defines 'to transform' as 'to change the nature, function, or condition of, to convert'. We seem to use the term rather freely without really taking into consideration what it means or involves. There is much discussion in India today on the topic of conversion. The church in India is accused of converting people to Christianity. The church's very narrow understanding of mission meant that it saw its task as one of converting people through the proclamation of the gospel; that is, converting individuals from their original faith to Christianity. One of the meanings of 'convert' is to transform. Transformation or conversion is therefore more than just bringing about a change in the religion of an individual or community. It is a process whereby changes are wrought in structures, be they political, social, economic or cultural. The process of transformation should therefore affect the individual personally, interpersonally and socio-structurally.

In 'Toward a Lutheran Understanding of Communion', prepared by the working group on ecclesiology, there is a section entitled 'Communion as Mission'. The mission of the church as communion is expressed in the sending out of disciples; in witnessing to God's saving action in Jesus Christ; in the public confession of one apostolic faith; in the exposure and critique of inhuman, unjust, oppressive and totalitarian behaviour; in expressing solidarity with all people in need; in the commitment to the *transformation* of unjust and inhuman situations; and 'through mission the communion of the church and the churches is related to the world as a sign of God's creative, *transforming* and final intention for humanity and creation'.[1]

The church therefore becomes a church by situating itself within God's work of transformation. Philip Hefner, in his Hein Fry lectures delivered in 1996, stressed this concept as the central image of God's work for us as individuals and as members of a community of faith. He posits that transformation is a characteristic feature of Christian tradition, fundamental to the Christian view of things, and at the heart of our conviction that something fundamentally new and different can be brought about by God's will and work.[2] We are Christians because we have the witness and the tradition of actual transformation already wrought in the encounter with Jesus of Nazareth. In his time many women, men and children, through their relationship with Jesus, experienced a transformation that changed the very foundations of their lives. The encounter

enabled them to envision futures and possibilities that were simply not options for them before. It is this experience of transformation that enables us to claim Jesus as the Christ, the Lord, the Messiah, the Son of God, the word made flesh. The announcement of who Jesus is and his importance are expressions of faith that such transformation is grounded in the ultimate, that its source is a self not our own but God's power of transformation.[3]

Transformation: A Biblical Concept

Transformation is at the very root of our Christian faith. It is at the heart of the saving, redeeming and sanctifying acts of God. In the Old Testament we have the witness of Israel's prophets who, unhappy with conditions in Israelite society, first expressed the hope of a transformed social order, a 'new creation' – a new heaven and a new earth, or a new age distinguished from the old – elaborately portrayed by means of different metaphors (Isaiah 65:17ff.; 25:6ff.; Zechariah 14:10ff.). Increasingly in Jewish apocalyptic writings the hope of a new creation was developed and expanded so that almost every reference to the past became an expression of the future (cf. 1 Enoch 45:1ff.). In the New Testament Paul appears to be the first to interpret the resurrection of Christ as God's fulfillment of the promise of a new creation. The new age which broke with the resurrection of Christ could only be compared to a new creation: 'the old has passed away, behold, the new has come' (2 Corinthians 5:17). All those who share in Christ's resurrection also share in the new creation: 'If anyone is in Christ, he [*sic*] is a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17ff.; cf. Galatians 6:15). The old nature belongs to the past; the new is created after the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22ff.; cf. Colossians 3:9ff.). 'All this is from God' (2 Corinthains 5:17): it is God's grace which transforms the old into the new. God's gift of transformation is not simply a return to an original condition but a transformation of what *is* into what *shall* be through God, and God in Christ, and God the giver of life as the Holy Spirit, who is the sole source and continuing energy of everything that is new.[4]

Despite the diverse nature of the New Testament each of its writings attests to this process of transformation brought about by Jesus Christ.[5] The Gospel of Mark aims at converting the reader from obdurate unbelief (3:6; 7:6; 10:33; 12:12, etc.) to belief and faith in the Good News of Jesus Christ, God's son.[6] Matthew aims at changing the reader from a life rooted in a Pharisaic interpretation of the Law (15:3ff.; 13ff.; 23:3ff.; 13, 23ff.) to the honesty that is the outcome of belief and obedience to the authoritative history and teaching of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, 'the son of the living God'.[7] Luke emphasizes God's love for the despised, redemption for those who in the eyes of humanity are lost and thereby seeks transformation of the oppressed to compassion, mercy and liberation.[8]

John writes in 20:30ff., 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which

are not written in this book. But these are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.' John wants to show that Jesus is the Messiah, to foster the faith of the Christians and reveal to them what they have in Jesus Christ in order that they may overcome their blindness and recognize the presence of God and experience life in Jesus Christ.

Pauline literature speaks of transformation from bondage to the Law to the freedom of justification. Paul even uses organic language to talk about the church, the transformation of the Old Israel into a New Israel.

The whole of the New Testament is therefore an interpretation of how Jesus Christ brings about transformation in the lives of individuals, families, society and its structures – economic, political, cultural, social and religious. As Hefner puts it, 'the New Testament is thoroughly grounded in, perhaps we could say driven by, the dynamic of transformation.'[9]

Transformation and the Lutheran Tradition

Transformation is at the very heart of the justifying and sanctifying acts of God. Having been justified by God's grace through faith we are enabled to appropriate the newness that God has chosen for us. It is by grace that we are sanctified and hence enabled to give expression to that newness in our daily lives in concrete and tangible ways. Transformation is *metanoia* or conversion; it is the radical reorientation of attitude and action in the light of the radical action of Jesus in his person and work. It is not tinkering and tampering but turning around. 'Our Lutheran emphasis on grace clarifies that this transformation is grounded in God's intention and in God's power for us and within us; it is not a humanly devised project.'[10]

I am reminded of the story of a hard-working farmer. He toiled and managed to turn an arid piece of land into fertile soil, blooming with all kinds of trees, plants, fruits and flowers. His pastor visited him and saw the lovely blossom. The pastor was eloquent in his admiration and praised the great and glorious creation of God. The farmer retorted, 'Padre, you should have seen this place when God had it all to Godself.' The farmer had grasped the gospel truth. God's will has to be sought and fulfilled not by God but by responsible and free human beings.

God has endowed humans with basic potential and it is for us to become partners consciously and deliberately with God; co-creators to bring about a renewed and transformed society and world. Our mission is never complete because we as the communion are called to participate in this continuing process of transformation. It is a never-ending task. I am advocating that the communion should cast itself in a new role as the advocate and champion of democracy, justice (particularly economic and social justice), tolerance, humanity and peace. What our world badly

needs is a church which dares to confront the powers of this world, be they political, economic, or cultural, and which in the name of the crucified Christ calls for justice for the poor and oppressed. The church's response cannot and must not be confined to personal charity, service and proclamation; rather, the church's response can and should legitimately take the form of social and political action aimed at altering and transforming the circumstances that cause suffering and poverty. We need to participate in the realization of God's promise:

> Behold I will create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind ... the voice of weeping shall no more be heard ... nor the voice of crying ... the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says Yahweh. (Isaiah 65:17–25)

Life in Koinonia: Unity in Diversity

What is the depth and dimension of the church's fellowship, its koinonia? How meaningfully can we use the term 'koinonia' to define ourselves? The biblical–theological foundation for this is the trinitarian principle of the co-equality, co-essentiality and co-eternity of God as Father/Mother; as Son/Daughter; and as the Holy Spirit. This is an endorsement and encouragement for recognizing plurality, both divine and human. It is a clear and categorical acknowledgement of collegial hierarchy and a radical rejection of vertical hierarchy. If transformation of society and the world is our mission, our life as a communion has to reflect the acceptance of plurality within itself: a plurality of races, cultures, genders, histories and heritages different to the mainstream; not northern European or even Lutheran. The dialectic of God's transformation takes shape differently according to the identity of the various communities and their contexts within the communion.

While article seven of the Augsburg Confession emphasizes the unity of the church by word and sacrament, and extols the essentiality and virtues of community, its grounding in the doctrine of justification creates problems. The doctrine of justification is the one and only truth which distinguishes the Lutheran community from other communities. Along with its stress on *sola scriptura* this has not only sustained generations of Christians but has also led to division, thereby weakening the witness of the church. The Lutheran tradition has not been very open to the plurality of religions because of its stress on one theological idea, namely justification. Its obsession with maintaining unity through the propagation of ideas such as the one word of God, one ministry of the word and the sacraments meant an inattention to the value of diversity or the character of community. As C. S. Song has said,

> Truth is a noble commodity. Being a noble commodity, truth cannot mingle with less noble things. It must stand out. It must stand above. And it must stand apart. Truth is a unique vocation. Being a unique vocation, truth does not recognize other truths. It cannot have equals. It explains itself and explains others. Truth is a universal claim. Being a universal claim, it cannot tolerate other truth claims. ... All in all, a truth affair is a judgmental affair. It judges and is not to be judged. It conquers and is not to be conquered. Union of contradictions, opposites and polarities is not its particular interest.[11]

Through maintaining such doctrinal rigidity, we have been practising what Gnana Robinson calls 'spiritual apartheid', excluding communities and peoples of different religions, views and races.[12]

Here, I should like to draw your attention to the problem confronting the Indian church, which is seeing the emergence of a new category of people called 'anonymous Christians'. They are those who are committed to Jesus Christ but may choose not to accept baptism for fear of cultural and social alienation and for economic reasons. Indian theologians are therefore proposing a measure of openness in table fellowship. In fact the church has to study the significance and meaning of baptism. We need to interpret our doctrines and presuppositions in the light of a changing context and sometimes this may even necessitate foregoing some of our cherished rituals and doctrines. Thus there is a need to rearrange our theological concepts to account for God's work in other religious communities and peoples different from our own.[13]

However, we must recognize the truth that we are justified in spite of our doctrinal inadequacies and because of them. Justification entails such an understanding and consequently it can be the theological foundation of a communion which embodies the reality of justifying grace by the insistence that the only condition for Christian community is that one come and join in the journey of discovering God in Christ. 'Justification in our times opens our eyes and our minds to the truth that there can be no humanity without a community of belonging and there can be no truth without such a community.'[14]

Koinonia through Deformation and Transformation

The Hebrew Bible commences with the notion of form (Genesis1:2; 2:7–8 and 19). It refers to the condition, which can be designated as formless prior to its formation, as the universe. It indicates what happens as a result of God's intervention and action. According to the ancient Hebrew testimony, God formed the universe and gave humans God's own form, in the sense of 'image' or 'likeness'. But in this divine formation, it is evident that God is without form and consequently sternly forbids any form of idolatry. To emphasize this formless being, God is conceived as a deformed being, the Suffering Servant. Thus the Hebrew Bible accentuated the

making or the unmaking character of formation in terms of deformation. The Hebrew people had to learn through difficult situations and difficult people. So it is not a stereotypical, static or passive view of formation, nor is it linear in the traditional sense.

In the New Testament Jesus is presented as the best paradigm for formation through deformation. His humility and humiliation, his service and servanthood, his ignoble death on the cross, witness to this phenomenon. The deformation of Jesus on the cross of Calvary and his resurrection should lead to our transformation as Jesus was transformed and transfigured. To experience transformation at the personal, interpersonal, and socio-structural level, it is vitally important to be willing for formation and deformation. These are interrelated terms. This will help us to understand the nature and the function of the community which we want to form as the church of God in Jesus the Christ. Community is written into our constitution. We are communitarian in essence. The church as a community has been in formation since the first century, taking on new shapes according to the challenges that confronted it. Mere physical, passive coexistence does not constitute a community in the true sense of the term.

It is only through deformation that a transformed community of the church as the sign and symbol of the coming reign of God is formed. It lives as integral members of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4–5), mutually indwelling and interpenetrating so that strengths are shared and weaknesses shared and transcended. This is the vitality and vibrancy of a living communion. This organic language is very evident in the writings of Paul (cf. Ephesians 2:20–1; 1 Corinthians 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, etc.). So we have evidence for the communitarian thrust of the deformation–formation principle. In his unfinished *Ethics,* Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, 'Formation comes only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as a formation in His likeness, as conformation with the unique form of Him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again.'[15]

Koinonia and Vulnerable Love

The many achievements and the concomitant euphoria and triumph that humanity experiences, is accompanied also by a creeping sense of helplessness and powerlessness. With all its wonderful inventions and discoveries, humanity has not been able to solve the basic problems of the hungry and the homeless. Pervasive poverty persists and grows and injustice flourishes in the modern world with impunity. Monopoly power goes unchallenged. Widespread ecological disaster threatens the life of this planet. This is the predicament of our time. We live in a broken, divided world with existential contradictions and alienation. There is a lack of will power and moral power.

The Bible imparts a perception of God characterized by *hesed* or *agape*: God is slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. Asian theologians have therefore understood God using Asian terms like *tsurasa* (aching void or pain), *thunai* or *dhukha (*pain-love). God is willing to become weak and repent (Genesis 8:21; Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:10). This Hebraic tradition is perpetuated in the incarnation of Jesus, when 'the word became flesh'. God's humanity embodies God's limitations and weaknesses – the suffering, crucified God. It is this very God that is glorified through the crucifixion and resurrection (John 12:32–4; 13:31; 17:4). If we have to live and serve in the manner of Christ, then we have to make ourselves vulnerable in love just as Christ did. The world needs to see the wounds of the church. This central affirmation is often forgotten in Christian life and mission. 'Pain-love language is the deepest kind of language. Jesus is God's pain-love word. God's mission is pain-love mission.' This is the word and the mission that truly communicates. In an authentic communion there is no place for aprioristic doctrines. Those of us within the communion need to learn the vulnerability of such pain-love. The demands of such love are high. We may be called upon to give up our cherished doctrines and dogmas and have a love affair with those within the communion and those outside that we seek to serve.

Koinonia as Solidarity through Justice

It has been realized painfully that the church cannot continue to talk about the poor and about justice without expressing solidarity. Jesus calls us to conceive of righteousness in terms of justice. It is not retributive or distributive or even proportionate justice; Jesus stood for creative or redemptive justice. In this effort he enacted the reversal of values as in the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

In one sense the church is a human community with its own spatio-temporal dimensions. The communion is a body or bodies of people who share some measure of common life and common allegiance. Consequently, the communion is a political, linguistic, interpretative community. But because of its common loyalty, it is a community of belief and action. This significant factor transforms it from a natural sociological institution to a religious fellowship. This renders its uniqueness irreducible. Therefore we do not need to exaggerate the differential, but the church, as the Body of Christ, should be able to transcend human-made barriers in attempting to approximate to God's righteousness and justice. It is a moral and covenanted community, not a club. Our beliefs entail trust, faith, commitment and action towards the subject of belief. Action is a function of commitment and a confirmation of belief. Action informed and impelled by this commitment must lead to radical restructuring leading to justice. We must maintain and vigorously promote the church's theological strength and character and thereby not diminish its clarity and credibility and move on to solidarity.

In the final analysis it is imperative for the communion to be in conformity with the will of God. To do so we need to have a discerning mind and heart. We need to be able to distinguish between suffering caused by human factors which must be questioned, confronted and overcome, and the suffering that cleanses, chastens and saves us. There is no passive acquiescence in the name of God's will. God's will has to be performed according to God's vision of the reign of God. The reign of God is open, free and inclusive, and the communion must endeavour to be so too.

Notes

1 'Toward a Lutheran Understanding of Communion', in *The Church as Communion: Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology,* Heinrich Holze ed. (Geneva: LWF, 1998) 22–3.
2 Philip Hefner, 'The Church as Well of Possibility', *Currents in Theology and Mission,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (August 1998), 249.
3 Ibid., 250.
4 B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 393–4. Cf. also Philip Hefner, 'The Church as Well of Possibility', 250.
5 David Rhoads, *The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
6 W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament,* trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 93.
7 W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 116.
8 Ibid., 139.
9 Philip Hefner, 'The Church as Well of Possibility', 250.
10 Ibid., 251.
11 C. S. Song, *Tell us Our Names* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 114.
12 Gnana Robinson, *My God and My people: A Study on Justification in a Multi-Religious Context – Asia* (Chennai: CLS, 1999), 8.
13 Theodore M. Ludwig, 'Some Lutheran Theological Reflections on Religious Pluralism', in *Religious Pluralism and Lutheran Theology,* ed. J. Paul Rajashekar (Geneva: LWF, 1988), 33.
14 Philip Hefner, 'The Community of Possibility: Belonging without Conditions', *Currents in Theology and Mission,* Vol. 25, No.4 (August 1998), 287ff.
15 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics,* 80.

Joint Ecumenical Evangelism

Wilson B. Niwagila

Introduction

The two terms 'ecumenical' and 'evangelism' have very significant meanings in the history of the missionary church. 'Ecumenical' is used in church circles to reflect the relationship between Christian communities who are committed to act as a household (an *oikos*). This kind of relationship is expected to be manifested between cultures, between churches, between people and society, between the world of humankind and creation as a whole.[1] The household is created and preserved by God as a household of life in which ecological, social, political and ecclesiological dimensions become inextricably intertwined.[2]

The household of God is a new community united to witness the love of God revealed by his messenger. The messenger carries with him the message that binds and unites, giving meaning to our Christian identity. This challenges the Christian communities to work together as partners regardless of their diversity.

'Evangelism' is a term derived from the Greek word *euangelion* meaning Good News. Evangelism therefore is to make the good news known to the household – the people of all races and times and in all places. It is a continuous activity of nurturing Christian communities so that they grow together in faith. Evangelism has the missionary obligation to make the message known. In this case *euangelizomai* is to announce the *euangelion*. The announcement of the gospel is the announcement of the good news from God which has to be done faithfully by churches called by the Holy Spirit. When churches compete in the announcement then *euangelizomai* becomes mere propaganda and rumours about God.

The classical text for the missionary task is found in the John 20:21: 'As the Father sent me so I send you'. Throughout the history of mission this text has received much attention because of its uniqueness. The language used here shows the unity between the Father and the Son and between the Son and the disciples. The disciples are addressed not as individuals as such but as individuals who have to work together to show the unity which exists between the Father and the Son. It is a joint exercise in promoting what John had already reported in John 17 (the prayer for unity). Early Christian congregations took the words of Jesus very seriously. They were all involved in the mission of God and in the communities they served. They cherished the fellowship of the apostles in their teaching, in their worship and in their evangelism. Their old differences – between Jews and Gentiles, between masters and slaves, between male and female – were not allowed to spoil their unity, through which they were enabled by the Holy Spirit to

evangelize without despair. Their unity impressed those who came into contact with them, and through their witness they were able to convince the so called pagans to become Christians. Romans 1:8–12 testifies to this. Paul is proud of the congregation in Rome because its faith was being testified all over the world. We know that this congregation in Rome was made up of Jews and Gentiles.

The history of the ecumenical movement proves that there have often been attempts to promote the spirit of joint venture in mission and evangelism. Joint evangelism is the sharing of the gospel with others. This was realized in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910, a significant gathering because it rediscovered the obligation of unity in evangelism. Participants in the first meeting of its kind adopted a resolution for unity. They committed themselves to Joint Ecumenical Evangelism. The emphasis of their deliberations was on evangelizing the non-Christian world and reawakening the spiritual vigour of Western churches.

At that time the movement understood mission as going from North to South and from West to East. The period of Western colonial expansion was gaining more attention and the Western churches shared the general confidence that their civilization was becoming superior to that of non-Western nations. They believed, therefore, that they were responsible to the rest of the world for spreading the civilizing impact of Christian faith. The First World War and the modern Christian enterprise which accelerated towards the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, facilitating the emergence of a fourth Oikumene, comprising the new churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America,[3] disturbed this optimism. Nevertheless we see here an attempt by Christian groups from different denominations to search for a joint venture in fulfilling their obligations as faithful participants in the mission of God.

The International Missionary Council which met in Jerusalem in 1928 adopted a new approach to evangelism after pre-war optimism had been shattered. There was much greater representation of Christian leaders from the young churches, demanding genuine partnership with the old churches. This partnership could enhance the discoveries made in Edinburgh and result in a more specific and genuine joint evangelism. The young churches challenged the old churches in Europe and America to transfer power in the task of joint evangelism. Some Africans in the 'mission fields' had protested against missionaries who wanted to row the boat on one side without including the Africans on the other side, which would enable the boat to move forward instead of going round in circles.[4] This was a clear indication that Joint Ecumenical Evangelism should be inclusive. Theological understanding of mission was that the missionary task did not rest entirely in the hands of Christians from the West; rather, it was the duty of every individual who confessed to Jesus as Lord. The African voice reminded Christian communities that *Missio Dei* was inclusive and involving.

The International Missionary Council at Tambaram in 1938 was occupied with the question, 'How do you bring the Christian message in a non-Christian world, especially to countries of the Orient with ancient religious beliefs?' The conference was dominated by the school of Karl Barth, which did not provide room for the non-Christian world to express openly its experience

of God. The conference did not give much thought to dialogue with the non-Christian world. The church in this sense became the only answer for humankind.

The Second World War undermined the credibility and image of the message from Tambaram. Many questions were asked in the non-Christian world about the authenticity of Western Christianity. Is it truly liberating, or is it alienating? Is the church the *goal* of God's mission or its *agent*? In *The Church Inside Out* Hoekendijk maintains that 'The nature of the church can be sufficiently defined by is function, i.e. its participation in Christ's apostolic ministry'. Hoekendijk's point of view does not encompass those Christian circles that are self-centred. Christ's apostolic ministry was an *invitation* ministry. We cannot expect to have fruitful joint ecumenical evangelism without being involved. Our participation in Christ's apostolic ministry compels us to be true followers of Christ.

The International Missionary Council at Willingen in 1952 concerned itself with the contemporary complexities of the world. Many countries were struggling to overcome poverty; those countries involved in the war were economically crippled and had to find ways of rebuilding their economies. The gap between West and East was increasing. The churches generally and the World Council of Churches in particular were very much challenged by the world situation. A number of questions became the focus of their discussions. Where is the mission of the church? What has happened in mission? What theological stand can the church take?

The main theme of Willingen was entitled 'The Missionary Obligation of the Church'. It was affirmed that the missionary movement has its source in the triune God. It was also clearly stated that such mission is not *our* mission but God's, in direct opposition to older views that encouraged individual mission societies and churches to talk the arrogant language of 'my mission, our mission fields, our mission centres', etc.

The Church as Participant in the Mission of God

The nature of the church as a missionary body is founded upon the revelation of the incarnation of God. Through the initiative of God, God has actively dealt with the salvation of humankind. It is from this fact that the church has to understand itself. The church is a community of Christians called to participate in the mission of God. To be participants in the *Missio Dei* does not allow churches or individual mission societies to do mission according to their own tastes or in an antagonistic, aggressive spirit. The *Missio Dei* reminds us that the Lord is the owner of the mission. When we read Matthew 28:16–20 we often forget that Jesus made it clear to his disciples that he is the owner of mission. Jesus said this to warn his disciples not to do mission as if it were their own private business. Mission belongs to God, but this does not mean that Christians have no obligations. Since we are the followers of Christ our participation in this mission is obligatory. It is obligatory because we have received this command, 'As the Father sent me so I send you'. God is the owner of mission because God is revealed to be all of the following.

The sender

Christians have experienced the God of love, the one who initiates the salvation of humankind. This love is full of grace, justice and self-giving. The Gospel of John makes it clear that God took the initiative in sending Jesus to the world. He took this risk so that the world may eventually believe (John 3:16). The Bible gives several examples of God's involvement in the salvation history of humankind, the most dramatic of which in that God became the one sent. The Swahili word *anayejituma* is in this case more precise than English. It means to take the responsibility in fulfilling assigned duties.

The messenger

God does not come only to bring the message but also to listen to the problems and the needs of people. Philippians 2:6–11 makes it clear that God decided to set aside glory and become one of us. Through the incarnation God becomes a messenger of peace, love and justice, our companion on the road to Emmaus (this world), answering our questions and giving us hope for the future. This is a journey that involves the reordering of memory so that the past no longer terrorizes the present.[5] On the journey we struggle with the issues, crises and pains of our time. It is a journey that gives us the opportunity to listen and reflect on the challenge presented by the messenger, with whom we share all our concerns.

The message

It is through the life, death and resurrection of the messenger that the world has received the true message. It is clear, therefore, that God has *become* the message. It is through this message that the world is saved and reconciled to the triune God. It is this same message that calls, unites and commissions the liberated and reconciled community to participate in God's mission.

Christians as Participants in the Mission of God

The creation story reminds us of the generosity of God in creating humankind in God's own image. This *Imago Dei* grounds humankind's potential participation in the activities of the creator, were it not for the greed and selfishness of humankind which destroyed this relationship. God therefore took another initiative and became a messenger to humankind in order to establish a new relationship. To those who accept and follow, God creates in them the image of the messenger. They become disciples of the messenger and are given the opportunity to participate in mission. To be participants in God's mission gives Christians the opportunity to serve and witness to the world with humbleness, serenity and gratitude.

Our participation in *Missio Dei* challenges Christian communities to be careful not to fall into the temptation of selfishness and greed, but to work together as partners with God and with each other. We cannot become faithful participants if we do not behave like a saved community under the guidance outlined in John 14 – 17.

A disciple is expected to live with the messenger. A disciple has to learn from him, not just by sitting at his feet and listening but through imitation and a readiness to be a servant. A disciple has to learn the values of humility and service as the basis of true wisdom and understanding. To speak of discipleship as true response to the call of the messenger and the message is to emphasize commitment to a life of listening, learning, growing and acting out the consequences of faith in the crucified and risen Lord.

The disciples as participants in the mission of God are not called to be masters but to be obedient servants in sharing the life of Christ with others. The recipients of the message are not passive spectators but active members, fully engaged in sharing the received message. Walking together to Emmaus is a journey where we experience the presence of God, which creates mutuality in our relationships.

Joint Ecumenical Evangelism, therefore, takes place when we understand ourselves to be nothing other than simple participants. We are called to walk together with the messenger, talking, reading the scriptures, extending hospitality and breaking bread together. Our discipleship in this sense envisions us to discover ourselves as equal partners with a message to tell the entire world.

How do we share the life of Christ in our respective countries and churches today? Sharing the message involves so many things. In Tanzania, for example, sharing becomes a necessity because we live in a pluralistic society. The challenges of life are so big that the Tanzanian Christian has no excuse not to be involved in this sharing. In sharing the life of Christ one has to know who Jesus Christ is. The African answer to the question is stated in Mark 8:28: 'Who do you say that I am?' The answer reads like this, 'You are one of us, sharing our pain and leading us in an African dance of new life.'[6] The African Christian's interest in Christ is relational; always there is this affirmation of faith, what Christ does for me, how he relates to me and to the entire community. Christ is recognized as the protector and defender of his people against seen and unseen forces that destroy life. Christ is strong in participating in the vital force of creating and guaranteeing abundance of life for his people. He is the healer and the Lord of life who cannot be defeated by witches.

In many ethnic groups in Tanzania, life is a process of continual initiation. Even death is an initiation into the form of ancestors (African traditional saints). Such communities read the life of Christ from Hebrews 2:10, which presents Christ as guide towards human perfection and salvation through suffering. His birth, his growth, his suffering, his burial and his resurrection are seen as rights of passage that perfect him as a master of initiation; able to initiate us through life and death. Health in the African sense is more social and cultural than biological. Healing, therefore, is a return to health in its larger, traditional sense: back to social harmony, physical

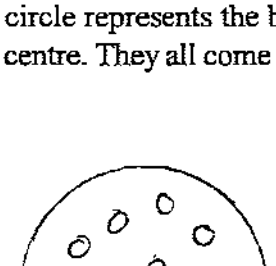
health and well-being under the care of God. To be healed is to recover lost harmony and to dispel fear and anguish. As healer, Christ becomes the true medicine of life in word and sacraments.

With this understanding in mind, the East African Revival Movement has (since the 1930s) involved all Christians of different denominations in working together to make such a Christ known to the African people. Their theology has always been Christ-centred, taking into account the theology of the cross and its relevance to African life. The movement has played a big role in the rapid growth of the church in East Africa. As regards grassroots ecumenism, the East African Revival Movement has championed joint ecumenical evangelism for a long time.[7]

Partnership in God's mission has been crucial to those involved in Christian service. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), for example, there is a participatory ministry in almost all congregations. This has been a dominant aspect of congregational life from the beginning. The ELCT North Western Diocese has grown from such a process. Anglicans, Methodists, the United Church and the Lutherans have played a big part in making this church what it is today. To arrange a 'service' in graded levels, performed as a team rather than as an individual, is the accepted and highly regarded indigenous way of the church. The participatory ministry involves bishops, rural deans, pastors, evangelists, deacons, parish workers and lay leaders. The principle of 'Everyone an evangelist' is applied. These are the servants necessary for sharing Christ with the Tanzanian people. There are three stages, which have made the church in Tanzania grow.[8]

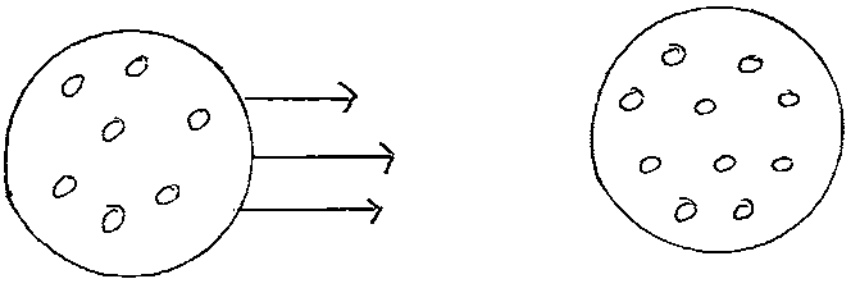
The individual congregation

Figure 1 illustrates this point. The circle represents the borders of the congregation, while each smaller circle represents a didactic centre. They all come together on Sundays and other arranged times.



Much of the teaching and preaching takes place in these centres. Congregational servants are needed in these centres to nurture and equip the people of God. Evangelism is not a one-person show but a fellowship of prayers and testimonies of experiences through reading the Bible.

The congregation reaching out



Members who move into new areas form prayer and Bible study groups under their own leadership and work towards planting a church congregation.

Growing into a diocesan church

Members of the Lutheran church have become very active in mission when they move into new areas. The growth of ELCT – about 10 per cent a year – is the result of joint efforts in evangelism by lay Christians, evangelists, pastors, deacons, parish workers, Sunday school teachers and bishops. Other denominations have assisted in supplying places of worship, exchanges of preachers and conducting interdenominational fellowship Bible study groups and evangelism programmes.

The dynamism of the church in East Africa, Tanzania in particular, is the result of joint evangelism motivated by the East African Revival Movement for the last 60 years. The Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa (founded 35 years ago) has also been a very dynamic ecumenical movement. Its objective have been to

- involve all denominations in a joint effort to discover new approaches in solving people's problems;
- aspire to participation in ecumenical theological studies and activities, e.g. worship, Bible studies and reflections;
- discuss social, economic, political and religious problems facing the people of East Africa and Africa as a whole.

The association encourages theological education to be done in two ways: first, teaching theological students to understand the situation they will face when they leave theological school; second, to let students work with local congregations under the leadership of experienced pastors and church members. The association made such an impact on theological students that an ecumenical Christian Student Union was formed in Tanzania (UKWATA). The student union has for many years taken care of students in secondary schools and colleges. It has encouraged students to read the Bible and reflect on those issues that challenge youth.

Despite the above, there is still a problem of denominationalism, out of which the church in Africa originally grew. As Otieno Munala points out, we need to understand that denominations adopted the strategy of carving out spheres of influence, which contributed significantly to the linguistic, cultural and ethnic segmentation of peoples.[9] Indigenous groups and splinter churches in many parts of Africa have done the same. Human laws have truncated the body of Christ, clouded the churches' vision of unity and deprived it of the witness that emanates from oneness. Jesus's relational model of ministry did not include competitive religion, but a community of disciples who were to live together united and committed to serve the world. It may be futile to expect denominational influence to weaken and perhaps defeatist to pray for its demise. However, these structures can be transcended in the realization of greater, nobler goals for Christianity in Africa and in other countries. Such goals include the effective distribution and sharing of resources; goals that tackle the causes of human conflicts that result in refugee camps and the displacement of people; goals which combat the exploitation of the poor.

In 1991 the All Africa Conference of Churches held a symposium in Mombasa entitled 'Problems and Promises of Africa: Toward and Beyond the Year 2000.'[10] One group deliberated on the question of unity. Is unity of the church or humankind a necessity in contemporary Africa? In its discussion the group arrived at the following conclusions:

- Unity is God's gift to which the church has been called. Here we are reminded of the purpose of our call, and that our call to participate in God's mission requires unity which is the gift of God. To work outside of the gift is to promote human pride and weakness.
- Christian unity enhances the evangelistic mission of the church. Since the mandate of the church entails reaching all humankind with the good news, a united front is necessary if the message of the church is to be heard. A divided church often presents the world with competing factions or conflicting messages, thus reducing the impact of what would otherwise be an effective message.
- Unity among the churches should extend or spill over to others. The identity of the church is in this regard the unity that stems from the unity of the triune God. The church is called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, so that humankind will know for sure that we are the disciples of the living Lord.

Areas of Concern in Joint Ecumenical Evangelism

Growth of big cities

In Africa there is a tremendous influx of young people to the big cities and municipalities. The challenges and problems facing youth in big cities requires a united front made up of churches, private organizations and government. In Dar es Salaam, for example, there has been a joint ecumenical effort to evangelize the city. There are also plans to mobilize all denominations, NGOs and individual groups to help young people develop small projects which will help them find a career.

Teaching Christianity in schools and colleges

How can we nurture school children and students during their early years in school? My experience as a parish pastor and chaplain of several secondary schools and colleges leads me to believe that in order to serve schools and colleges better a joint ecumenical arrangement is required. In 1979 a new association of religious groups was founded in Kagera Region, Tanzania and I was elected chairperson from 1979 to 1983. The association includes Roman Catholics, Protestants and Muslims. Its objective is to make best use of the two hours a week of religious instructions in schools. Since there are so many schools in the region, these two hours were not used as planned because there were not enough teachers from each religious group. As we discussed this matter with pastors, priests, school teachers and government officials, it was clear that both Protestants and Roman Catholics could support a curriculum that could be used by Christian teachers. Fortunately, the Protestants had already prepared a curriculum, called in Kiswahili *Kueni Katika Imani* (Grow in Faith). The Roman Catholics accepted it in principle, with one request to rewrite a chapter on church history, the argument being that at an early stage we should not teach pupils the negative elements of the history of reformation. This whole endeavour also challenged Moslems to develop a curriculum which could serve both hardliners and progressives.

Ministering to the sick and afflicted

Taking care of souls requires people with the necessary knowledge and talents. Our hospitals require well-trained counsellors. I believe that there is a need for all denominations to work together so that there is at least one chaplain for all denominations in one hospital. The present policy for each denomination to send its own chaplain does not reflect the one body of Christ. It is also, after all, very expensive to work separately.

Joint venture in social issues

In developing countries churches often compete, so that a good number of projects are duplicated. Why can't we plan together? If, for example, we wish to help people in rural areas to have clean water, why not involve all denominations?

Conclusion

An African proverb among the Shona people of Zimbabwe states: 'To put a roof on the walls of a house needs the joining of hands'. One ethnic group in southern Tanzania, the Wakinga, are expert in cutting wood with a hand saw. Two people drag a log on top of a prepared pit. One stays on top and the other goes into the pit. Both cut the timber according to measurements indicated by lines drawn on the log. If either of them decided to work independently of the other the results would be disastrous, with confusion, misunderstanding and even fighting. Christians are commissioned to work together in unison, each at his or her proper place, promoting and fulfilling the messenger's assignment. 'As the Father sent me so I send you.' The task we have been given requires joint action.

In a consultation between the World Council of Churches and the Reformed Ecumenical Synod there was a discussion about the nature of the church and the role of theology. Jean-Marc Chappuis remarked:

> The only way open to us to authenticate our preaching of the Gospel in this generation is to accept the contemporary challenge. We preach the universalism of the Church. This preaching will be authenticated if it is made quite clear that there is ample room in the Church for every human being. We preach the unity of the Church. This preaching will be authenticated if we set about combating all forms of segregation with the same energy displayed by Paul in opposing the discrimination which oppressed Gentile Christians in the primitive Church. We preach the apostolicity of the Church. This preaching will be authenticated if the Church of Christ and the Apostles, of which we are members, refuses to conform to this present age but on the contrary demonstrates its fidelity to the gifts and claims of its Lord. We preach the holiness of the Church. This preaching will be authenticated if we are vigilant over ourselves, and one another, without complacency, and if in our communities we practice a discipline designed to safeguard us from doctrinal and moral heresies. If we do this, we shall become credible witnesses to all the families of the earth when we announce the blessing which is promised to them.[11]

Notes

1 Harold F. Miller, 'An AACC Vision of Africa Renewed', in *Perspectives on Africa*, Nairobi, 1996, p. 36ff.
2 Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, 1991, pp. 87–90.
3 Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *The Biblical Basis for Evangelisation*, Nairobi, 1989, p. 60.
4 Wilson B. Niwagila, *From the Catacomb to a Self-Governing Church*, Verlag an der Lottbek, Hamburg, 1988, p. 235.
5 Robert J. Shreiter, 'Reconciliation as a Model of Mission'. Unpublished paper, p. 11.
6 Boniface Tshoa, intervention at the 1994 African Synod. 'Fifth General Congregation', L'Osservatore Romano, 17, 1338 (27 April 1994), p. 11. See also Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz (eds) *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, Pauline Publications Africa, Nairobi, 1996, pp. 75–9.
7 Bengt Sundkler, *Bara Bukoba: Church and Community in Tanzania*, London, 1980.
8 Fidon Mwombeki, 'The Dynamism of Christianity in Contemporary East Africa'. Paper presented at the Conference of Africa Association for the Study of Religions, January 1999, p. 4. Compare also John Mbiti, 'Cattle are Born with Ears, Their Horns Grow Later'. In: LWF All African Lutheran Consultation on Christian Theology in the African Context, 5–14 October, Gaborone, p. 37.
9 Otieno M. Munala, *The Missionary Enterprise: A Rhetorical Analysis*. MA thesis, Ohio State University, 1980, p. 1.
10 *Problems and Promises of Africa Towards the Year 2000*, ed. Andrew Karamaga, AACC, Nairobi, 1991, pp. 68–80.
11 Jean-Marc Chappuis, 'Universalism of the Church', in *Nature of the Church and the Role of Theology*, Geneva, 1975, p. 47.

Mission as Diaconia

Kjell Nordstokke

Praxis[1] Needs Meaningful Words

In Brazil a conference on diaconia was closed with a session on evaluation. A woman from a small town in the hinterland said: 'Now I know what I have always been doing is called. Its name is diaconia'. She told the audience about the kind of activities she was involved in: organizing women farmers against the use of dangerous pesticides; participating in a local human rights movement; visiting sick persons in her community. She had always done this with an inner conviction that her action was profoundly motivated by her Christian faith, but she had heard very little in sermons and elsewhere in the church that affirmed a relation between these activities and her identity as a Lutheran Christian. During the conference she had discovered that link and also that what had engaged her for so many years, had a proper name with strong biblical roots: diaconia.[2]

There is an important relation between what we do and the terminology we use. Sustainability has to do with both. Terms reveal the *identity* a specific activity is rooted in. Identity signifies the continuity of the activity, even if its focus shifts according to context. Identity tells what continues to be the same idea even in shifting circumstances. Identity also signifies that which integrates different elements of a subject. An organization might run a number of different activities, but normally there are some integrating traits that explain the composition of activities in all their variety. Identity always includes an understanding of what differs from other activities. The identity of the church makes its youth work different from other youth work, even if similarities sometimes seem to be most prominent.

Mission as Praxis and Identity-giving

Over the last two centuries mission has been a term that has expressed Christian identity. Despite many changes in our understanding and methodology, mission has continued to be a vital concern of the church. The Lutheran World Federation has repeatedly affirmed commitment to mission: 'Participation in the mission of God is the central purpose of the church. ... The mission of the church always takes place within specific, changing, historic contexts and differing cultural situations and therefore bears their marks. Its continuity, however, is based on God's own

activity in the world as revealed uniquely in the person of Jesus Christ and in the sending of the Holy Spirit'.[3] Thus the identity of the church's mission is rooted in God's own mission. To be in mission is an expression of God's graceful generosity towards creation and at the same time a task in which God's lordship is witnessed. It is both a *given* identity and an identity *to be identified* in the missionary praxis.

In other words, mission refers both to a historical praxis and an interpretation of Christian identity. Identity offers a criterion for self-evaluation and renewal. In situations where mission was perceived as a Western enterprise related to paternalistic approaches, the identity made possible a reformulation of the understanding of mission as God's mission. When mission practice in some contexts was seen to be concentrated in recruiting new members for local congregations, this same identity stimulated the development of the expression holistic mission. Now perhaps this identity requires new concepts.

Development Related to Mission: A Growing Problem

Today, the distinction between mission and development work challenges the churches in their mission in a similar manner. Problems within the realm of practice are deeply related to terminology and the way in which identity is conceptualized.

As I see it, there are two major terminological problems. The first concerns the understanding of mission as evangelism and relating this term in a constructive way to mission at work. Here the problem is how to relate proclamation as the very core of mission to a holistic approach. Should 'holistic' be understood in an all-embracing manner where every task and activity of the church is included in the missionary activity? Can such a comprehensive approach be upheld when it is insisted that the 'primary goal for the church's participation in God's mission' is 'to make disciples of all nations'?[4] How can 'holistic mission' be more than just a rhetorical formula and a critique of some traditional mission practice? Can the expression be turned into constructive criteria for mobilizing churches in their mission and finding proper co-operation between partners?

The second problem concerns the terminology normally used for activities related to the 'work for peace and justice and in the struggle against all enslaving and dehumanizing powers' that the LWF document understands as 'an integral part of the mission of the church'.[5] Normally these activities are classified as development or social action. These terms and their professional rationale belong to the world of development ideology of the four last decades. Ideologically, they include different political convictions. History can be shaped through social and political intervention. The societal models of the West (to Scandinavians, especially the social-democratic political model) should be adapted by developing countries. Economic growth is possible in the South if technology, systems of infrastructure, etc., are implanted according to Western models. The term that integrates all these convictions is development. It is optimistic both in its

anthropology and in its political analysis. Following the rationale of most social work, its primary concern is the relation between goals and measures in order to facilitate changes identified by the professional as desirable for a group or a local community.

Strangely enough, churches have adopted the terminology and the rationale of development without too many questions. It has become the basic *why* and *how* of international social action. As development theories have changed during the last few decades, the churches have been faithful and changed their rhetoric relating to development and service. One reason for this may be the churches' dependence on a Western political worldview and secularized approaches to social and political issues. Another reason may be the dependence on ODA-money of church-related agencies, a relationship that has linked funding to determined concepts regarding how this service should structure and perform its activities. Consequently, development work could not be combined with evangelism and community-building unless it could be explained in a way that gave local churches a role that would promote democratic structures and people's participation in development. The rationale as a whole, however, has been determined by functionalist and socio-political arguments.

Critical questioning from churches in the South has not been able to subvert this ideological framework. Christians from Latin America have rejected development as a neo-colonialist term unable to deal with structures of dependency. Africans have questioned the building-up of structures where the departments of development of their churches easily could get money from abroad, while there was no interest in supporting other departments and, for instance, programmes of evangelization. As a result of this practice some churches suffered from new patterns of class difference: those working for development projects received cars and good working conditions, while pastors and evangelists hardly got any salary. In some parts of the world Christians wondered how agencies from the North could work with governmental bodies and different NGOs without hesitation, but show no interest in working with local churches. It also became difficult to understand how Christians from the same country in the North could be represented by different agencies – one for mission, another for development – without any co-operation between them.

For some years this model has been discredited by the implosion of the modernist vision of universal development. Globalization follows quite different patterns. Optimism is being replaced by postmodern indifferentism. Public funds are drying up together with the developmentalist worldview. How to deal with this situation? In my opinion, different initiatives should be made to make possible a reapproximation between the praxis and the identity of the church with regard to the understanding of mission. In other words, there is a need for renewal, and in my opinion this renewal implies both methodology and terminology.

Methodological Renewal

Methodology means a consciousness about the manner in which a task is performed. Is it possible to reinvent mission in a holistic way that is more incarnated in people's lives than an overall theory on socio-political development? Here 'incarnated' is understood to represent different perspectives:

- It places reality as experienced by people as the starting-point for reflection and action. A well-known example of this method is found in the tradition of see–judge–act within the Latin American theology of liberation.
- It opens the metaphysical dimension in the human quest for truth and justice. Thus it recognizes the same liberating power of God that was revealed in Jesus Christ in the struggle for life and human dignity in today's world. And it also affirms the church's commission to testify in favour of hope and the future through word and deed.
- It presupposes an interdisciplinary reflection in which social and human sciences together with theology are asked to discern human conditions and possible transformation.

Terminological Renewal

Closely related to the need for methodological renewal, there is also a need to reformulate terminology. In my opinion, the term 'diaconia' represents a possible way of giving 'what we are doing' a new name that is both critical and constructive, in the sense that it enables a relation to the identity of the church and to its understanding of mission.

In the Lutheran tradition, diaconia is most often understood as charity work. The historical background is the Diaconal Movement in Germany, founded by persons like Fliedner and Wichern, and organized as communities of deacons, professionally prepared for working in hospitals or other diaconal institutions. In addition to this specialized activity, diaconia has also been understood as charity work in wider terms. In some Lutheran circles it has been discussed whether diaconal work presupposes an ecclesial context, or whether it should be understood within the realm of creation, as any human being's call to do good works. Placed within this understanding, where diaconal work above all associates with charity, to alleviate suffering and comfort those who grieve, diaconia as a concept evidently has many limitations.

In a wider ecumenical context, diaconia relates to the ministry of the church. In many churches, a deacon is part of the ordained ministry, not necessarily related to charity work or social action, but either as a first step in the clerical career or as responsible for certain administrative duties. In this sense, diaconia should probably be understood to be whatever deacons do. Evidently, its contribution to the question under discussion here is minimal.

While these two understandings either reduce diaconia to poimenics or to a possible way of structuring the ministry, a third understanding sees it as an ecclesiological concept expressing the serving nature of the church. Accordingly, the diaconal dimension of the church is rooted in the biblical presentation of Jesus. He came 'to serve [Greek: diakonein] and give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). The serving nature of his mission is presented as a model for his disciples (John 13). Most likely, the memory of the diaconal ministry of Jesus was decisive for the development of structures of leadership in the early Christian communities. Diaconia was the term for office or specific tasks given to a person (1 Corinthians 16:15; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19). It was also used for important activities (Acts 6:1–6). It is also interesting to note that the 'international campaign' organized by Paul to assist the poor in Jerusalem was simply called 'the diaconia' (Romans 15:31; 2 Corinthians 8 – 9).

Summing up, we see that diaconia has a christological basis; it is an expression of the church's nature and as such is manifest in the way in which the church is structured and assumes practical responsibility, especially for the needy and the excluded.

How could this concept of diaconia be useful for the topic under discussion? First, some cases where diaconia has become part of a revitalized language. In Brazil, the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), through its department for diaconal work, tries to foster a diaconal consciousness both in congregations and among those who are responsible for different projects. Through this effort IECLB hopes to encourage local responsibility, rooted primarily in its identity as Christian communion, and thus reduce the dependency on foreign resources and structures. In a similar way, Norchurchaid (NCA) in Norway is now presenting itself as an organization of international diaconia. Thus the organization has rediscovered concerns that were central to those who founded it 50 years ago. At that time it was considered important to express NCA's identity as a church-related agency in continuity with the diaconal mandate of local congregations, which forms the constituency of NCA in Norway. But at the same time, the use of this term also indicates a profound dependency on the faith, the hope and the serving love of sisters and brothers in churches around the world and to whom NCA is related through different programmes and projects. This terminology does not limit diaconal activity to strict ecclesial structures. As a diaconal special agency NCA considers itself within the tradition of diaconal institutions with a mandate to act primarily among the marginalized and needy, also when and where the church as a local congregation is absent in these specific contexts.

Mission as Diaconia

How should diaconia be related to mission? There are two possibilities, depending on how mission is defined. When mission is being defined as the all-embracing task of the church, diaconia should be considered a fundamental dimension of mission. There is a long tradition of seeing *liturgia, kerygma* and *diaconia* as the three main dimensions of Christian *koinonia*. An

important task for missiology would then be to find the integrating point of this identity, in a way that is ecclesiological and not merely functional or practical. The understanding of the LWF as 'serving communio' (Curitiba 1990) presents a creative point of departure for reflecting the diaconal relationship between member churches. The term 'service' may be too vague to maintain this relationship to the identity of the church. There is always a risk that service is reduced to social action according to a socio-political understanding, and without links to the theological framework that I consider fundamental.

If mission is seen as synonymous to kerygma or the task of evangelization (a definition that is as possible as the other one), the missiological task consists in elaborating the reciprocal relation between mission and diaconia, but also the distinct identity of each movement. Put in simplistic terms, the first may be said to aim at faith, the second at transformation. Now faith – in its widest sense as a human phenomenon – is an intrinsic part of and a basic condition for transformation. On the other hand, transformation means dealing with human realities, reacting to injustice and suffering, empowering the excluded to be agents of change, dignifying human life, and constructing a more sustainable society.

Either of the above two definitions should result in witness and service being seen as distinct, but inseparable, mutually necessary expressions of God's mission to the world.

The diaconal dimension of mission can help Christian witness to be more incarnated in people's lives. Contextualization is correctly regarded as a vital challenge to mission, but normally this has been understood as an approximation to people's culture and religious worldview. It could be, however, that *doing* is the most convincing way of *being* contextualized, following the example of Jesus, who through his diaconia, his care for others and especially his solidarity with the sick and marginalized, manifested his mission for the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 10:6). Jesus's contextual *doing* is characterized both by being critical and being active, and it involves a quest for interpretation. In response to his intervention in favour of the widow in Nain, where the mother was given back her dead son, the following interpretation was made by those who had witnessed what had happened: 'God has visited his people!' (Luke 7:16). To them, incarnation was revealed as a real saving presence in a context of death and grief.

In the same manner, diaconal doing should express the Good News incarnated in people's lives and struggle, as an expression of God's mission in which also the church is called to participate. This understanding is in continuity with the practice of the ancient church. At that time, Christians interpreted care for the sick and needy as a way of bringing the kingdom to earth, thus anticipating what hope is longing for. Is Christian mission possible today without this kind of incarnatory contextualization?

The mission dimension of diaconia can help Christians interpret their action in favour of the suffering and marginalized as good work and as expressions of God's provident care for creation.

These two perspectives are interrelated. The first upgrades good work as a meaningful act in itself, and not only as an expression of some theoretical system, as normally the case in social work. Modernity has often mocked good works as charity, ideologically considered very suspect, but acceptable if it could be integrated into professional and theoretical frameworks. Postmodernity has questioned any work as good or meaningful. In such ideological contexts it becomes a challenge to express faith in doing good as meaningful, both in itself and also as a potential for constructing meaning in people's lives and relations.

Diaconal faith regards good works as possible fruits of God's love and care for creation. This second perspective may be related to the classical understanding of God's providence. This expression affirms that God acts *pro nobis* (not *contra*), which does not mean God's predestination, but saving presence in all situations. Further, the term presents an active God who listens and sees; his sensibility makes the voiceless heard and the excluded seen. This image of God makes possible a diaconal spirituality that considers sensibility for human suffering a central expression of Christian discipleship. Following the word of the Lord, 'What do you want me to do for you' (Matthew 20:32), diaconia is called to a praxiological witness of God's provident care for creation. Can diaconia in its praxis maintain its identity and sustainability without such spirituality, especially in situations where action seems meaningless?

In the LWF holistic mission has become a key expression. The LWF mission document from 1988 states that

> The wholeness of mission needs to be manifested by the unity of word and deed in all of the church's outreach. Both are vehicles of the unconditional love of God who accepts persons while they are yet sinners and without any regard to their social, racial or cultural background. Word without deed falsifies the very word itself as it makes the gospel abstract and denies God's transforming power in creation and in incarnation. The failure to accompany witness through word by witness through life may close the door to the gospel. On the other hand, the deed without the word is in danger of degenerating into sheer humanitarianism and conformity with the context and of failing to convey the fullness of salvation as God's gift. The credibility of the witness is ultimately grounded not in deeds, which are bound to remain imperfect, but in the gospel itself.[6]

Again, the question is how to make this more than a rhetorical formula. In my opinion, it is vital to stimulate both missiology and the science of diaconia (diaconics) in an interdisciplinary reflection, regarding the epistemological framework, the methodological approaches, and above all the theological implications of this interrelation. This could give new guidelines, both for mission and for international diaconal work.

Notes

1 The term 'praxis' is used for social action that is planned and goal oriented. In this way praxis should not bee understood as any kind of practice.
2 I use the term 'diaconia' to indicate that it both includes a certain praxis, a social framework that gives a determined identity (the church in its widest understanding), and a disciplined reflection (theory) in order to systematize what is being done in a professional way.
3 *Together in God's Mission: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission* (LWF documentation, no. 26, 1988, p. 5).
4 Ibid., p. 9.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., ch. 4.1.4.

Witness through Service

Marta Kovacs

It seems strange for me to give a presentation on mission, since it is something I have never learnt about. I am from a country where churches had a defensive, self-protecting attitude for four decades. That attitude also coloured my theological education. In Hungary, communist state policy toward religion was predicated on the Leninist doctrine of the withering away of the churches. The concept of mission, therefore, had no place in our theological education, which was supervised by communist state agencies.

I graduated in 1986, before the political changes, in a period when the need for pastors was greatest. So I started my pastoral work without any practical training. We were sent out to congregations on our own to manage as best we could.

My theme is 'Witness through Service'. Who is it that we are witnessing about? The answer, of course, is Christ. But then we have to ask what was this Christ like? There are two types of witness about Christ: pointing at him, like John the Baptist, and the call to follow him, which has its basis in Jesus's declaration: 'If any one serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, there shall my servant also be.' These two types of witness – the pointing and the call to follow – should work together and not be played off against each other.

The pointing type of witness should point to the fact that in Christ we can see God's participation in human life. Every aspect of this participation can be followed, just as Jesus calls us to do. Of course, we can only point to the core of Jesus's service; Christ's ontological uniqueness means that God fully participates in him. We can only point to this fact, in the hope that persons will be reconciled to God. This need to reconcile persons to God comes from a theological and not a legal interpretation of sin.

The great danger of the pointing type of witness is that it can easily degrade faith into ideology. For example, in Hungary the Communist Party had a crucial, existential need to strengthen its base, such that it was in its own interest to gain as many people as possible. Churches should never act like that because then they would be the same as any other party or ideological association whose main concern is self-preservation. Bonhoeffer said, 'Blessed is the church that is protected by God alone.'

The goal of mission cannot be the preservation of the church, or the strengthening of our faith, by increasing the number of churchgoers. Nor can mission be the means by which we measure our personal success. The goal of mission is not to make the church stronger, but to make the

person in need stronger. This is possible only through empathetic witness, which always takes into account specific individual contexts and their emotional and intellectual consequences. An example of witness without empathy was provided by the confession of a seminary professor of mine. The professor visited a seriously ill cancer patient in hospital. He tried to console the patient by quoting Hebrews: 'For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives'. Hearing this, the patient cried out in a hopeless voice: 'Then God shouldn't love me!' In our witness there is a time to speak and a time to keep silence, as we read in Ecclesiastes.

Mission should not exist to serve Christ or the church of Christ. Mission exists to serve the individual person with Christ and with the church of Christ.

What about the other type of witness, the call to follow? Throughout church history there are many examples of such witness. The Syrian wandering ascetics wished to follow Jesus in 'kenosis', the emptying of the self. The early Christian martyrs were the followers of Jesus in their willingness to die. St Ignatius of Antioch was eager to suffer: 'I desire to meet wild animals – I fell in love with death'. St Francis of Assisi and his companions undertook to follow Jesus by living in poverty. Such followers of Christ are heroic and they can fire us with enthusiasm. At the same time, however, they are dangerous, inasmuch as their relative peculiarity may hide the natural and simple humanity of Jesus.

I live in a small village of a thousand inhabitants. The communist regime destroyed the ancient structure of such villages: their economic units, the family farms. The churches – which had previously organized community life – were effectively restricted within the walls of their own buildings. Today, village people live in relative poverty, which is made even less bearable by the constant presence of consumer life-styles projected by all the media.

Such circumstances mean that my pastoral role should embrace the same destiny as my people by my remaining in the community. Within the church there are many other responsibilities which are more respected financially and socially than the rural ministry. But I and my husband firmly believe that 'human faces cannot be changed'. I am deeply concerned that the faithfulness of a minister should witness about the faithfulness of Christ.

This is not a special form of asceticism in our lives; on the contrary, we love rural life, its colourful characters, its closeness to nature. I interpret my service as a pastor as a destiny – something which forms my very life. I am a person who is entitled to address my people week by week. I also know that the life of a sermon does not reside in the words alone, but rather behind the words, growing out of an understanding of one's destiny and acting upon it.

How are the two types of witness – pointing and the call to follow – realized in my service? I preach mainly to old people, which means that I have to offer consolation in my sermons. Religious consolation is an elemental need for old people. This does not mean that children and

younger adults do not need consoling, but at a younger age it is not usually so essential. I agree with the Indian proverb that 'Children play, adults work, and old people pray'. As our opportunities on earth contract, simultaneously our souls may expand.

For the young people of the village we have organized a performance group, and we play pieces from Hungarian folk tradition centered around Easter and Christmas. Our men are quite reserved about their faith and also about the Bible, but like rural people in general they have a deep understanding of history. For them my husband organized a so-called 'wine bottle club', where each man can bring a bottle of his own wine and talk about history: local and national history, as well as church and salvation history. I organized a craft club for women, which also functions as 'work therapy' for those who are especially over-burdened.

Our sister congregation is in Transylvania, Romania. This is unusual, as most congregations in Hungary seek for such connections in Western Europe.

I know that there are happier parts of the world where these kinds of activities seem natural, but in my country, after forty years of atheist education and anti-clerical propaganda, we have to make people understand that churches are not against them but for them. The work of the sower is in vain if the soil is uncultivated. Jesus cultivated the land of Israel by signs and miracles to ensure that it was capable of receiving the seed, the word. In my country, the service of cultivating the weed-choked land entails observing and meeting the needs of the community.

What the church does, it does as the church of Christ, and people know this. As they experience the service of the church, they can open themselves to accept the service of Christ and follow the will of God. As Dante wrote: 'God's will is our peace.'

Track Two: **Partnership in Mission**

Track Two focused on the practice of partnership between churches, more specifically in the areas of mission and evangelism. Discussion evolved around four areas of concern, namely, Missionaries of Today, Accompaniment in Mission, Being in Partnership, and Mission in Contexts.

Missionaries of Today

- **Who are the Missionaries of Today?** - The Rt. Rev. Dr. Ambrose Moyo (Zimbabwe)
- **Seafarers Ministry: A Case Study** - Presenter unable to attend

Accompaniment in Mission

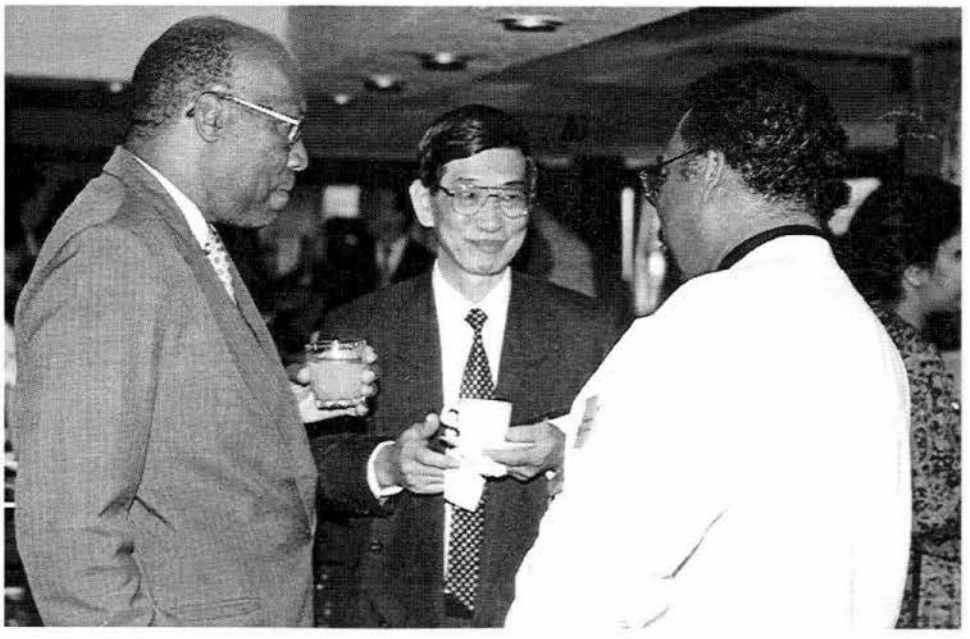
- **The Triune God: Source of Mutuality and Power** - The Rev. Bonnie Jensen (USA)
- **South-South Partnership in Mission: A Case Study** - The Rev. Rui Bernhard (Brazil)

Being in Partnership

- **Forms of Mission Partnership in the Worldwide Lutheran Communion** - The Rt. Rev. Dr. Julius Filo (Slovak Republic)
- **Joint Mission Partners** - The Rev. Hannes Gänssbauer (Germany)

Mission in Contexts

- **Challenging Dimensions of Mission** - Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro (Switzerland)
- **The Christian-Muslim Contexts in Africa** - The Rev. Dr. Joseph A. Ilori (Nigeria)



Who are the Missionaries of Today?

Ambrose Moyo

Introduction

Today the church of Christ exists in almost every country of the world. However, the Congress on the World Mission of the Church (St Paul, USA 1998) observed that one of the ironies of history is that 'while the church today for the first time exists as a vital community amidst all major cultures, more people than ever have little or no opportunity for a hearing of the gospel of Jesus Christ'. There are also millions who have heard the good news of God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ but chose not to accept it. In my home country, Zimbabwe, approximately 70 per cent of the population is Christian, 3 per cent Moslem and the rest are mainly adherents of African traditional religions. The gospel has been and continues to be preached to them and they very much respect the church for its work in helping to improve the quality of life for everybody through advocacy and its health, education, and community development programmes, but still reject the relevance of Christ for their lives and prefer their ancestral religion. Other religions of the world are also making their way into every country.

In the light of this situation, when more than ever before there is need for Christian witness, it is especially appropriate to ask 'Who are the missionaries today?'. Churches have been established in Africa, Asia and Latin America through the missionary activities of European and North American churches. Even today we still have church workers who are called missionaries from these countries. Some of the churches from the two-thirds world are also sending missionaries across their borders. Behind our question there is another, namely, 'Is there still a need for missionaries today?' The fact that there is no longer a zeal to support mission work abroad, manifest in the reduction of financial aid and personnel, suggests that in the view of many Christians in the North there is no longer such a need. There are still millions who need to hear the good news because God's desire is that everyone should be saved and should come to knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). But who should do that work? Should it be left to the local church, or should we continue to see it as the responsibility of the local church *and* its sister churches?

Behind this topic is the need to revisit our understanding of who the missionary is in the light of our Christian calling. Should the term be restricted to only a few individuals called by their churches and sent to foreign lands to bear witness to Christ through mission and diaconia, as it has generally been used? It is this narrow definition of who is a missionary which needs to be revisited in the light of the biblical witness and the rapidly changing world. The topic also raises another question which cannot be ignored in this discussion, namely, 'Who needs the missionary today and where is the greatest need?' Is it just in the churches in the two-thirds world or is the

greatest need today not found in Europe? The Congress on World Mission of the Church also made the following important observations: where Christianity has for long been entrenched, we see a great retreat; yet where Christianity has had a minimal presence in the past, we see massive accessions. Among once sending churches filled with enthusiasm for mission we see a certain dilution of resolve, fragmentation of purpose, and a bewilderment as to the nature of the continued involvement in the universal sharing of the gospel.

These observations show that Christianity's world map is changing very rapidly, with the base shifting from the North to the South. Missionary organizations in the North have started withdrawing or are scaling down their commitment to mission in other parts of the world in terms of missionary personnel and financial support. That enthusiasm for mission and for sharing the gospel and other God-given resources no longer exists, and is being replaced with 'each nation/church/person for itself and God for us all'. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, there was a time where there used to be about a hundred missionaries from Sweden. Today there has been only one missionary for many years. But the church has been growing over the years without foreign missionaries.

Several reasons could be advanced for the withdrawal or scaling down of support for mission in Africa, Asia or Latin America by the churches in the North. Financial difficulties are often cited as a major reason for withdrawal or unwillingness to enter into new partnerships. This retreat from commitment to mission on the part of the Christians in the North must be a cause for concern to all Christians in both the North and the South. But it also raises very sharply the question under discussion: 'Who are the missionaries today?' A narrow definition of 'missionary' will not motivate every member of the church to see themselves as missionaries as long as they have delegated the work to some personnel to whom they pay a salary every month. This attitude can be very harmful to the spiritual life of the church. Lack of interest in or commitment to mission is a sign of a church that is gradually dying.

Church and Mission

The LWF Ninth Assembly recognized in its report that Christian 'witness is the basic task of the Church. It is indispensable to our identity and integrity as Christians' (Ninth Assembly Report, 1997, p. 53). Christian witness is not a prerogative reserved for only a few members of the church or for some churches. It has to do with the very nature of being a Christian. The question 'Who is a missionary today?' is not being raised for the first time. There is consensus today that Christian witness belongs to the very nature of the church. Where that missionary zeal no longer exists in a body of people who claim to be disciples of Christ, that group ceases to belong to the church of Christ. Mission is of the essence of the church. 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (John 20:21). The church lives by the great commission to 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19). A church can only remain the church of Christ when it participates in the ongoing saving work of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through mission.

The LWF mission statement rightly defines mission as 'God's mandate to God's people to participate in this continuing saving work' of the triune God (LWF Documentation 26, Geneva, 1988, p. 5). The call to faith in Jesus Christ is a call to be a witness to God's saving work in Christ and to defend one's faith: 'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect' (1 Peter 3:15). The commandment to love your neighbour is a call to mission or Christian witness (Luke 10:27). The biblical understanding of a missionary cannot be restricted to those who have left their homelands to take the gospel of Christ to other lands or just those that have been sent by their churches on the mission to 'make disciples of all nations'. To be a missionary means to bear witness to God's saving work by word and deed, and this is what every Christian is called to be. The observation from the Congress on World Mission of the Church that 'While the church today for the first time exists as a vital community amidst all major cultures, more people than ever have little or no opportunity for hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ' is a very serious indictment against Christians. Who then are the missionaries today if Christians do not see that as their responsibility? If a church exists in the midst of all major cultures and the people with whom Christians interact on a daily basis have no opportunity to hear the gospel, that church needs to do some thinking as to the purpose of its existence as a church. The need for missionaries today cannot be over-emphasized.

Today there are many Christians in the North who have come to believe that Christian mission, particularly when it crosses cultural boundaries, is a form of Christian imperialism which must be shunned and discouraged. My experience with American university students has been that very few of them speak positively about the missionary enterprise and, in fact, feel ashamed of their missionary ancestors for having gone to Africa, resulting in the destruction of African religions and cultures, and their replacement with Christianity and the new culture that came with it. In other words, it is fashionable for young people in North America and Europe to condemn their missionary ancestors for destroying other people's cultures which many argue were better and purer than the Christian faith. This simply underlines that there is a greater need for missionary work in the North than in the South, hence the need to clarify for ourselves as to who is the missionary today in both the North and the South.

The traditional understanding of a missionary as someone sent from a foreign land to preach the gospel has been misleading, hence the deterioration in the commitment to mission, particularly in Europe. Most European churches are not growing and interest in supporting foreign mission is dwindling. In baptism we identify ourselves with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that new identity expresses itself and is alive in mission, in its witness to God's redemption through Jesus Christ. The fact that the church is growing very fast in Africa without a large presence of foreign missionaries affirms that Christian witness is understood to be integral to the call to Christian discipleship, hence the church is growing without large numbers of salaried pastors and lay evangelists. The presence of foreign missionaries in the South, desirable as it may be, is no longer a critical factor for the mission of the church today. But what does this mean for the relationship between the churches in the North and the churches in the South?

Communion and Mission

All the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation understand themselves as being in communion with each other. This means that our lives are bound to each other; when one member suffers, we all suffer; when one member is honoured, we are all honoured. We are a family and each member of the family exists for the other. The stronger member of the family must strengthen the weaker member. This calls for mutual respect, for openness and for regular dialogue and consultation when major decisions or policy changes are being contemplated in our churches, including those relating to mission policy. Being in communion with one another means that we must stand together in mission; we have bound ourselves to participate in each other's mission, not as foreigners but as members of the same family. Each one of us has resources to contribute towards the life of the other member and its witness to God's saving work in Christ. We all stand to benefit through participation in God's mission to the North and to the South. In such a communion we have to be missionary to one another. Being in communion with each other can only result in mutual empowerment for God's mission.

The power which lies behind our self-understanding as a communion has not been fully realized. Being in communion means we have to be open with one another; we have to be transparent to each other. Often transparency is demanded from the poor churches in the South while the rich churches in the North are not transparent to the churches in the South. This lack of openness to each other has often been a cause of conflict and unnecessary suspicion. The churches in the South only get to know the amounts budgeted for them by their partners but are never shown the entire budget of their churches. Communion means we have to be accountable and transparent to each other. Our relationships have sometimes not been smooth because we have not been honest with each other. The churches in the North have not been openly critical about the churches in the South, and have often only spoken out in extreme cases, which has often been accompanied by the withholding of funds. Often they have watched a situation develop for quite some time, but without openly saying anything to their partners in the South. On the other hand, those of us in the South have often been afraid of voicing our criticism of our sisters and brothers in the North for fear, rightly or wrongly, of economic sanctions. In a communion such as ours, and if we should be together in mission, we need not be afraid of criticizing each other as sisters and brothers who care for each other. It is my hope that we can all leave this consultation with a commitment to be open and transparent to each other, and with a commitment to call a spade a spade. This I believe will significantly improve the relationship between the churches in the North and in the South for the benefit of our life and mission together.

The Dependency Syndrome and Mission

I want to believe that if the communion concept is taken seriously, there should be no poor churches in a communion such as ours. Early missionary activities in Africa were focused on the preaching of the gospel and on service or care for those in need as a practical expression of the Christian love for God and neighbour. The traditional understanding of who the missionary is

had both positive and negative results. On the positive side, it indeed produced churches that are today alive and are often the envy of churches in the North. That was the primary aim of the missionary movement. That was effective, and we can only be grateful to God for that success. The challenge to both the North and the South is not to destroy the work for which some men and women risked their lives.

Among the negative results, I have already mentioned the dampening of missionary zeal in the North. The ordinary Christian's participation in mission became limited to making financial contributions. That limited understanding of who the missionary is also produced churches in the South that suffer from a terrible dependency syndrome. In Africa the issue of the self-reliance of the new churches was never considered from the beginning, hence most of these churches are highly dependant on financial support from the North to sustain their work. In other words, the traditional perception of the missionary created a dependency syndrome that in the end will cripple many of the churches if concrete steps are not taken to solve the problem.

It is very much regretted that today our brothers and sisters in the North are retreating and withdrawing their support, both in terms of finance and personnel. That traditional understanding of a missionary which came from the North created the dependency syndrome, and should have been dealt with before thinking of withdrawal. This impacts negatively on mission.

Regretfully, the trend within the last few years has been that churches in the North are withdrawing participation in the mission of the churches that they founded before making adequate provision to ensure that those churches will be able to continue the work for which their ancestors sacrificed their lives. The result is that young church leaders keep running to beg for the basic means to sustain their churches from their rich partners in the North. Begging for basic necessities of life is very humiliating, and in a real communion efforts should be made to empower the weaker mission partner or companion to find means to be self-supporting. The missionary of today can only be produced in an environment where the local church is self-supporting and has a leadership adequately trained to meet the challenges of today. Most of the churches in Africa, for example, are not able to attract the right calibre of persons into the Christian ministry because they pay salaries that are below the poverty line. This cannot produce the right missionary for today.

A very positive development in the relationship between the churches in the North and the South is the establishment of companionships or twinning relationships between churches in the two-thirds world and dioceses, parishes or congregations in the North. Some of them are yielding or promising to yield very positive results. Through exchange visits people get to know each other and to understand each other's situation. Those from the North get to see the effects of poverty and perhaps begin to re-examine their values, appreciate their fortunate situation and become motivated to support the mission programmes of their churches across geographical and cultural boundaries. The emphasis in this new approach has been that churches relate to each other as equals, a noble idea to which I whole-heartedly subscribe. It is essential to insist that

each partner must be clear on how it hopes to benefit from the relationship.

However, if our church-to-church relationships and our communion as Lutheran churches is to be relevant and meaningful we need to see a commitment on the part of all the members of the communion to end poverty and the dependency syndrome of the other members of the communion. As long as there are rich churches and poor churches in the same communion we cannot speak of equality. We all know that in today's world people hardly listen to the poor. The tendency is not to consult with them but to simply tell them what they should do. It is happening today in relationships between the rich churches in the North and the poor churches in the South. The structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and the World Bank have had a very negative impact on the economies of most of the two-thirds world countries where they has been applied. Policies are implemented without taking into consideration the situation and the experiences of the people that will be affected. In a communion relationship such as within the LWF, one would expect a greater sensitivity towards the feelings of the other members of the communion and seek their input when making mission policy changes. Regretfully, some mission agencies still behave in a manner similar to the IMF and the World Bank and are not happy with criticism from their third world companions.

The need today is to empower one another for mission as we enter the next millennium, and this to me means ending the financial dependency syndrome and supporting initiatives in the North to establish spiritually vibrant churches. We can no longer afford to start new missions and establish new churches whose means of livelihood would be dependent on the founding church; neither can we afford churches that are spiritually cold, or pay exorbitant sums to maintain huge and very well decorated churches and cathedrals with pews that are empty for most of the year. The missionary of today is the one who is capable of instilling the spirit of self-reliance from the beginning and moving people towards a relationship of interdependence. It is our joint responsibility, and together we must find meaningful ways of being in mission together.

Bridging the Gap to Meet the Challenges to Mission

The reality of the situation today is that within the Lutheran communion there are churches that are very rich and there are others that are very poor. There are churches that are struggling for survival. Watching from outside and seeing the numbers grow, one might envy the two-thirds world situation. But the lack of financial resources for mission has a negative impact on the calibre of people that the church can call on to provide the much needed professional leadership which is essential to enable the ordinary Christian to be an effective missionary. Those who live in Africa, and I believe it is the same in Asia and Latin America, are witnessing very rapid social, political and economic changes. In Zimbabwe, for example, universities are mushrooming significantly and the number of university graduates is increasing very rapidly. My church is faced with a situation where the pew is becoming more educated (even theologically speaking) than the pulpit. The majority of pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe are now upgraded lay preachers, most of whom do not have even a year of secondary education. The

church's financial resources cannot produce a sufficient number of trained pastors and theologians to cope with the demand, hence its resort to ordaining some evangelists after giving them as little as three months' ministerial training. These can only be effective in the highly impoverished rural areas where most of the people have received little or no education at all. This will not continue for a very long time, since the government has built secondary schools, staffed with university graduate teachers, within the reach of every child. Our people have learned to respect education, and a pastor with little education suffers from an inferiority complex and is despised by the people, which means that unless we act now to produce a new breed of pastors, capable of enabling the ordinary member of the church to become a missionary without any complex or fear, we shall soon experience a decline in the number of Christians in Africa.

Most of the mainline churches in Africa are facing serious challenges from the Pentecostals. As Lutherans we have our very sound theology based on the witness of the prophets and the apostles in the Old and New Testaments, Luther's small catechism, the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the ecumenical symbols. But this theology needs to be owned by the membership so that they are able 'to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have'. How can they defend that faith or that theology unless the church prepares them for such a defence? How can they be effective missionaries unless they are enabled by the church? Can the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe use a Standard Six pastor to prepare missionaries to the hundreds of graduates who have gone through the university and hold degrees in science, philosophy and other disciplines? Do we really expect these pastors to be able to grasp our Lutheran theology and be able to assist those who, as a result of Pentecostal influences, are questioning some of the basic Lutheran doctrines and practices?

Only recently several members of our youth group in Bulawayo were re-baptised by a pastor from one of the Pentecostal churches whom they had invited to speak at one of their gatherings. He told them unless you are baptised by immersion, you are still not saved. He immediately invited them to come forward for 'real' baptism, and more than twenty-two of them did. The youths are questioning many things in their church and want to see other things they have seen practised among Pentecostals introduced in their church. They do not want to leave the Lutheran Church, but they have some problems with the theological positions of the church. The problem is not with the youths and we cannot blame them for raising these questions. The problem is with pastors who do not have adequate theological and ministerial training to respond to the questions and challenges to our Lutheran theological positions and practices posed by the Pentecostal movements, and are not relevant and contextual in their interpretation of Luther's catechism.

The missionary of today in Africa can no longer be the same missionary of the early period of mission work, but must be adequately trained and prepared for their missionary tasks. This means that the Lutheran communion must give high priority to theological and ministerial training if we are going to build a lasting church in Africa. The challenges from Islam, African traditional religions, Pentecostal movements and new religions demand careful strategic planning, analysis and preparation of the membership as a whole. The missionary of today in Africa needs training,

hence investment in training is the best thing that we can do for the church in Africa and, I believe, in other parts of the two-thirds world.

The Lutheran communion is probably the richest communion in the world. One of the strengths of the Lutheran communion is its support for the ecumenical movement and ecumenical projects. It is necessary that we support and participate actively in the ecumenical movement. We have a very rich and sound theological heritage which we can bring to the ecumenical table. We need to keep that theology alive, and at this stage of the ecumenical movement we need to keep our identity within the movement. However, if one considers the support that the Lutheran family is giving to ecumenical bodies while reducing support to members of their family, to the detriment of their Lutheran identity, one begins to wonder whether our priorities are in the right place, as this undermines all previous missionary efforts and sacrifices by our Lutheran ancestors from the North. The gap between rich churches and poor churches within the communion needs to be bridged if our communion is to be fully realized. It is my hope that this consultation will recommend strategies to empower the churches in the South for mission in their countries and to the North by providing them with means to be self-supporting. I want to believe that greater commitment to the self-reliance of the churches in the South will strengthen their missionary efforts and enable them to produce the missionary of today and promote a relationship that is based on interdependence and mutual respect.

Conclusion

Who are the missionaries today? My response has been to say look at what is happening in the churches in Africa south of the Sahara as an example, without foreign missionaries and with very meagre financial and trained human resources. The churches are spiritually vibrant, continue to meet the needs of their communities through their health and educational institutions, and participate in community development in the effort to improve the quality of life for all the children of God. The challenge for the Lutheran communion is to sustain the zeal for Christian witness in the South and to re-kindle the same zeal in the North. The reality of our situation in both worlds today and the close relationship which exists as a result of our self-understanding as a communion, shows that we need each other today more than ever before for our mission outreach as well as community service programmes.

What kind of a relationship are we looking for as we move into the third millennium? For us in the South we are looking for a relationship in which we can also feel we have a contribution to make; we are looking for a communion in which no member is made to feel less important; a relationship that is not determined by financial strength, but by love of neighbour; a relationship which is of mutual benefit to all member churches in the Lutheran communion, one that is focused on serving God's people wherever there is need. Hence, for us the empowerment of the weaker member of the communion should be given priority as we reflect on our partnership in God's mission today and in the third millennium.

The Triune God: Source of Mutuality and Power

Bonnie Jensen

Empowerment in God's Accepting Love

> What we need is not a new religion, or new peace between the religions. What we need is life – whole, full, and undivided life. Isn't this the essence of the gospel: God, the eternal, infinite God, is so close to you that he loves you, and in his love accepts you just as you are? People who feel the faintest spark of this love become conscious of their own dignity, get up and walk upright and live with heads held high. (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*)

Mutuality in the creator

'God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" ... so God created humankind in God's own image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them' (Genesis 1:26–7). The basis of respect for one another is the common image of God. This gift of dignity and value is a foundation for mutuality and empowerment for all humankind.

Mutuality in the communio

God's unconditional love revealed to us through God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth creates new persons and a new reconciled community. The new community is nurtured and empowered by the word of the gospel and the sharing in one bread and one cup (1 Corinthians 10:16–17). The common ground for a new community in mission is the level ground beneath the cross.

Mutuality in accompaniment

The Easter story in Luke 24:13–35 tells of disciples walking together on the road, the accompanying 'stranger,' the struggle to understand scripture and the current tragic events, the straight talk and sharp encounters, and finally the breaking of bread. As God accompanies us, so we walk together, side by side, in a companionship of equals, affirming and challenging one another along the way.

Empowerment in the incarnation

God in Jesus Christ has crossed the boundary of god-ness to creatureliness, to become human flesh. The powerful God has become servant of all (Philippians 2:5–8). Any mutuality achieved by us will find its vision and empowerment in this incarnational manner of God. 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5). In the Magnificat, Mary sings of God's great regard for the lowly and hungry. She points to the great reversal when the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the rich are sent away empty (Luke 1:46–55).

Empowerment through the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit gives Christian disciples the power to act, to witness, to live in communion, and to serve in God's mission of life for the world. 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

Empowerment through the Holy Spirit's gifts

The Holy Spirit pours out a variety of gifts and ministries on the members of the community. 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *'for the common good'* (1 Corinthians 12:7). All members are given gifts and ministries for the mutual building-up of the whole community and for its mission in the world. The participation and gifts of all the members are needed so that the *communio* and its mission may be whole and effective.

Empowerment through baptism

Baptism into Christ transcends human differences of race/ethnicity, social class and gender. 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:27–8). These differences cannot be the basis for separation, discrimination and exclusion within the baptized family of Christ. Rather, these differences are the diversity of gifts that God uses to empower the church of Jesus Christ to reach out to all nations and people.

Reflections on Power

Emptying the powerful

'The mighty are brought down ... the rich are sent away empty' (Luke 1:52–3). God's power is made perfect in weakness, in vulnerability, in letting go of domination, privilege, pretension and arrogance. In Jesus, God's power is used on behalf of the 'other', the excluded and marginalized, the suffering and dying. Power is not hoarded but shared.

This is a radical departure from hierarchical power which locates a limited sum of power in one or a few people at the top of the pyramid, in which a few powerful people control decisions and resources. The powerful *need* the powerless in order to maintain their privilege and control. The rich *need* the poor to remain poor in order to maintain the status that their riches afford them. Dominating and unjust leaders *need* scapegoats to take the blame for their evil. The religious leaders 'need' a crippled woman to stay crippled (Luke 13). Society *needed* a lame man at the gate (Acts 3). The religious order *needed* a haemorrhaging woman and lepers to be society's 'unclean' members. Society *needs* demoniacs and the 'insane' to express the sickness and craziness of all of us. Whites *need* Blacks, Asians, Arabs or Latinos to feel superior. Mission agencies *need* mission fields to receive their initiatives in mission. They *need* the so-called unreached and objects of mission to justify their programmes and fundraising campaigns. The so-called powerful need the powerless in order to maintain their power over the other.

Empowering the powerless

'The lowly are lifted up ... the hungry are filled with good things' (Luke 1:52–3). 'God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world ... to reduce to nothing things that are' (1 Corinthians 1:27–8).

God incarnate is present in the creation, in the man Jesus. God becomes human, enters the lowly and lifts it up. The powerless are emboldened. The bound are released. The poor hear good news and find dignity and hope.

Power is not seen as static, as a limited quantity, but as something that grows like leaven in the loaf, and salt in the world. It expands as it is shared, as others participate in it. The power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is a power shared and expanded. Those who are alone or marginalized or frightened are infused with the power of God, are lifted up and sent into mission.

Such expanding power from below has consequences. The so-called powerful are intimidated and often retaliate with repression and violence. The crucifixion of Jesus is a prime example. The way of Jesus in mission is the way of solidarity with the weak, of resurrection in death, of empowerment within powerlessness.

Implications: Ideas for Discussion

The following suggestions are intended for discussion among those who seek mutuality and empowerment as they walk together in Christ's mission. The suggestions imply a great need for the shifting of power from traditional patterns of domination and dependency to new models of mutuality and empowerment. In this vision of mutuality and empowerment there is new freedom for all who share together in God's mission.

The Christian community in mission finds mutuality and empowerment through:

Participation

1 Ensure that those affected by decisions participate in the decision-making, that the so-called 'objects' of mission become 'subjects' and take initiative in their own context.

2 Develop 'partnership fora' for churches in the North (similar to co-ordination committees relating to churches in the South and East) to ensure equivalence in advice and counsel, and in sharing and exchanging gifts for mission.

3 International church representatives attend and participate in decision-making meetings of mission agencies and departments.

4 Persons from the South serve as staff members of northern mission agencies.

5 With regard to the participation of women, church leaders and theologians address issues of (a) re-interpretation of scripture texts used to marginalize women; (b) exclusion of women in leadership positions; (c) low compensation; (d) intimidation and violence against women.

6 Church leaders conduct fora where women share their experiences with the bishops and other leaders.

7 Churches take steps to ensure that the Christian community is a 'safe place' for women and girls, including freedom from violence, sexual harassment and intimidation.

8 Churches challenge cultural attitudes and behaviour that view and treat women unjustly.

9 Churches identify other excluded groups and members and take similar steps to rectify injustices.

Communication

1 *Truth-telling and reconciliation.* Church and mission leaders create settings and occasions for telling the truth and healing the memories of injuries in the imperialist and colonialist missionary past and present. Mission agency representatives overcome defensiveness and listen to the stories of pain and critique. Injured members overcome reticence to tell of their experiences. Specific steps are taken to be accountable for ongoing behaviour and attitudes that perpetuate pain. Rituals are developed to express reconciliation and healing.

2 *Transparency.* Churches and agencies in working relationships with one another share information on planning, decision-making and finances.

Confronting white racism

1 Develop and conduct anti-racism training for northern whites including mission executives and missionaries. Develop training that confronts the reality and consequences of systemic racism and white privilege in the global communion. Northerners listen and learn, and take steps to address the racism that pervades mission perspectives and attitudes. This includes the view among the northern grassroots constituents that global mission is a white missionary giving something to a brown-skinned or olive-skinned person.

Capacity building

1 Train and equip leaders for all leadership roles and church vocations. Develop and support 'servant leaders' who share power with colleagues and constituents.

2 Review missionary assignments to ascertain if they are contributing to or delaying the empowerment and localization of leadership and structures.

3 Provide opportunities for women and poor people to 'catch up' in education and ministry opportunities through intentional strategies such as quotas in student bodies and scholarship funding, and increased funding for preparatory levels of education.

4 Share effective models for stewardship education among the churches.

Equitable sharing of gifts and resources

1 Expand the concept of resources to include the full range and wide diversity of gifts in the communion, not just financial or personnel resources.

2 Create mechanisms for more equitable and multilateral exchange of personnel, South to South, South to North, North to North.

3 Recognize that poverty, homelessness and suffering are also found in the world's richest nations. Representatives of those national churches visit and live in the South to experience the gifts that enable the church to minister in such situations.

4 Share widely in the global communion the effective models of ministry among poor people.

5 'Name' and find permanent solutions to both the dependency syndrome and paternalism. Address over-control by donors and irresponsible management by recipients. Share widely within the global communion the successful models and strategies.

6 Churches in the South raise consciousness in the North of churches and nations in the North growing richer, and their role in the impoverishment of the South.

7 Confront the attitudes of 'entitlement' and private ownership of resources. Educate for transformation of donors in order to share with recipients the control of decisions relating to funding and expenditures. Examine and discuss together the pros and cons of unrestricted block grants vs. designated gifts.

8 Conduct fora where highest-level church leaders in the North listen to Southerners speak about world economic issues and implications for *communio.*

Just structures and organizations

1 Develop policies and guidelines that ensure equitable participation of those likely to be excluded: women, ethnic minorities, least educated, economically marginalized.

2 Build flexibility and mechanisms for reform within the structures themselves, including constitutions and written policies. Identify and expose for examination informal and unwritten rules and practices. Provide mechanisms for easy change of policies and practices that no longer serve the purpose of the organization and its mission.

3 Create policies that provide for sharing of information including financial reporting. Ensure that information is public and is shared widely.

4 Provide for consultation and interaction with grassroots representatives.

5 Provide clear expectations and procedures for accountability and reporting by leaders and decision-makers.

Commitment to diversity

1 Articulate and practise a biblical and theological basis for honouring diversity of persons, ideas, practices. Initiate education of leadership and grassroots people.

2 Develop worship and fellowship rituals that regard diversity as a gift of the creator and build unity within an attitude and acceptance of differences.

3 Ensure diversity within leadership, policy-making bodies, congregational life and global relationships.

Consultations

Initiate consultations and meetings that:

1 Improve co-ordination in decision-making and practice of mission.

2 Develop mutual exchange relationships.

3 Plan mission in new areas, including nearby churches.

4 Plan mission and re-evangelization of the North.

Worship and prayer

Develop worship and prayer life within the Christian community that

1 Expresses worship and prayer in the cultural context of the people; recovers devotional expressions that have been lost or forbidden.

2 Regularly intercedes for the world and all creation.

3 Honors and incorporates the diversity of gifts and participation of all members of the community.

4 Incorporates a variety of images, art and musical forms, languages.

5 Overcomes language and images that undergird militarism, domination, sexism, racism, classism.

6 Empowers God's people for mission and life in this world; turns outward toward participation in God's movement for life in the world.

South–South Partnership in Mission

Rui Bernhard

Introduction

The Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB) began in 1824 with immigrants from Lutheran and other Protestant churches in Germany. Despite many difficulties they organized themselves into congregations in their new homeland. The pastors and teachers for the schools they established also came from Germany, as there were none available in Brazil. As a consequence, the need to strengthen the church became strongly linked to the organization of a school system.

From its beginnings, therefore, the Lutheran church espoused a German theology to predominantly German congregations. It was effectively a German church in Brazil. Things began to change at the beginning of the twentieth century, when a teacher-training school was established. In 1946 a Lutheran seminary was founded for Brazilian pastors. Although its theology continued to be German/European in character, the church began to have Brazilian teachers and Brazilian pastors.

The church's close relationship with the German Evangelical Lutheran Church and the financial support it received continued to determine its theology and ethnic identity. It remained a German Lutheran church in Brazil, with congregations principally concerned with their own needs and interests.

Further change occurred in the 1960s and then especially in 1970, when the repression sponsored by the military government in Brazil was at its height. The church finally became aware of the need to commit itself within a specifically Brazilian context. Amid extremely difficult circumstances for the Brazilian people the church gave its witness through an important document called the Curitiba Manifesto, which condemned the repression and pledged committed church action.

From then on the IECLB attempted to reconstruct itself as a church with a Brazilian profile, concerned with mission and diaconia. Most of its important diaconic activities were begun within the last thirty years, during which time projects were either first implemented or strengthened. More and more congregations have increased their understanding and experienced the power of the gospel within their basic social, cultural and religious context.

Many important things determine the identity of the church today. The church's new constitution, approved in 1997, includes the following aspirations:

1 We want to build up a missionary church with the participation of lay people who, it is hoped and expected, will take over the responsibility for this process.

2 We wish to achieve financial autonomy from the churches of the northern hemisphere, by promoting internal solidarity among our congregations.

In our efforts to do all these things we are examining very closely what has happened within Latin America over the last ten or fifteen years. We have discovered, also together with the LWF, that we have to share the concerns and challenges of all the Latin American churches.

North–South Partnership

Historically speaking, Christian mission around the world was always conducted by European, Scandinavian and North American churches and mission societies. In most cases, it was a one-way process with minimal planning and little or no participation from the people evangelized. This kind of mission restricted churches to a bilateral North–South relationship. In many cases financial support from northern churches effectively dictated the theology, dynamics, culture and life-style of people in the southern churches. There was no concern to establish South–South co-operation among the churches. The southern churches had no time to think about it because they were always busy writing reports about their work for the northern churches in order to ensure future financial support. Neither were the northern churches concerned to build awareness among southern churches in order for them to achieve financial autonomy. Over recent years Latin American churches have become increasingly aware of their financial dependence, but most cannot see how they can achieve autonomy.

Another concern we have is the growth of individualism in a world which is more and more globalized and fragmented. Never has koinonia been so important and so necessary, but probably only the poor know its true significance. We have to be open and humble enough to learn from them. As churches we also have to learn from one another. Improving the dialogue between churches is one of the most important challenges for the future, as there is no longer any place for exclusivity and isolationism. We have to listen to the message of El Escorial: the 'Ecumenical Sharing of Resources' means sharing, but it also means the participation of all partners in deciding what is to be done and how it is to be shared. This is certainly not an easy thing to do, but it is urgent, because it will create new relationships between persons, groups, churches, communities and nations.

In one sense this means that churches can no longer elaborate unilaterally the theology of mission. It has to be done co-operatively, South–North and particularly South–South. It also means that we have to become closer, know one another and start speaking the same language if we want to succeed in our efforts as churches in the world. It is no longer possible to exclude the perspectives of the world's different social contexts and cultures. South–South co-operation is one important factor in this process. We have to be partners in mission. We have to become aware of our local context, which we neglected so badly in the past, in order to work out our own theology of mission, according to local needs.

South–South Partnership

Recently the IECLB has tried to promote South–South partnership through co-operative programmes with other Lutheran churches. In Latin America this has happened over the last fifteen years and has helped create awareness of the need for co-operative action.

Exchange of human resources

In the past, many Lutheran churches called their pastors and teachers from northern seminaries. Over recent years, however, churches have become aware that the cultural identity of Latin America facilitated an exchange of pastors and teachers native to the region. This contributed to the elaboration of a Latin American theology, which is still being developed. Nevertheless, exchanges with northern churches continue, because we understand that it can enrich the life and theology of churches in the North and the South.

Exchange in theological education

It is not feasible for many churches to maintain their own seminaries, so a student exchange programme is well developed. Many students study in the Lutheran seminary in Brazil, and Brazilian students spend their internship and exchange study in neighbouring countries. This exchange is very important because it enriches students and churches and makes efficient use of theological education centres.

Exchange of literature

Churches are placing more importance on developing their own literature based on local expectations. The exchange of such literature helps increase its availability and strengthens the regional identity of churches.

Special programmes for lay people

Churches are aware that special seminars, consultations and training programmes for lay people are very important. By means of such sharing of resources opportunities are provided for the participation of representatives from neighbouring churches. This is true particularly of specific programmes in diaconia, because diaconia is increasingly related to mission.

Co-operation among Lutheran schools

Managers, administrators, advisers and teachers meet regularly to exchange information on policies and study programmes, curricula, etc. This enriches the content of school education and also disseminates the knowledge and teaching of a wider Latin American context.

All such programmes in South–South partnership help strengthen the idea of the one universal church. In a time of individualism and religious pluralism it is very important for churches to co-operate as much as possible. At the same time, we have to illuminate our own cultural background and take it strongly into consideration in our testimony as church in the world.

South–South Partnership with Mozambique

The experience of South–South co-operation in Latin America motivated us to extend it to the continent of Africa, especially to Mozambique. This has happened during the last ten years. It is a worthwhile experience, but very different and much more difficult. Our shared language (Portuguese) has helped, but the cultural differences between Latin America and Africa make partnership rather difficult. Another source of difficulties is the different ecclesiological understandings of the churches: there is an episcopalian structure in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mozambique (ELCM), while the IECLB has a congregational structure.

From the outset it was clear within the IECLB that what we offered was co-operation, while the ELCM was always motivated to ask for support to meet its main needs. We never tried to impose our way of being a church, out of respect for the local culture. Co-operation began with the participation of one IECLB representative in the Joint Mission Board (JMB), made up of some African churches and one German church. Through the JMB we tried to support the process of building up the ELCM.

Co-operation was also extended to support literature development and the exchange of human resources. A Brazilian pastor was sent to Mozambique for three years. As expected by the ELCM, he took over the leadership of a local church and co-ordinated its efforts to gain official recognition from the local government, develop literature for different areas of church work and establish new congregations, etc. This was a very difficult experience with a lot of tension on both sides, principally because of cultural and ecclesiological differences. A Mozambican pastor spent a year in Brazil for complementary study and some practical congregational work.

Short five-week training programmes were developed in the ELCM and run by skilled people sent from Brazil. One such training programme was in finances, as there was a need to train local people. The director of the ecumenical seminary in Maputo, Mozambique spent five weeks in the Brazilian seminary to prepare an exchange programme for seminary students. Up till now only Brazilian students have gone to Mozambique as part of this exchange. A short training programme for Sunday school teachers is also envisaged, plus the exchange of one teacher from the Brazilian seminary, who will spend five weeks in Maputo.

From its beginnings the ELCM has invested in the theological training of local pastors. This encouraged us to offer human resources to help them work out a programme of diaconia. A deaconess has started work in one of the church's districts. It is hoped that this work will motivate young people for similar service, offering them the opportunity for one year's study, possibly in Brazil. After their return this person could be introduced to diaconial work, helping to motivate others. Eventually, a local team can take over the work and the deaconess can return to Brazil, where she can share the richness of her experience and what she learned from the local church.

Finance is a very sensitive issue in all this. As regards human resources, all expenses are met by the IECLB as a practical sign of solidarity. Clearly, such financial support is limited and the local church has to think about its autonomy. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also makes a small financial contribution to support special programmes between the IECLB and the ELCM.

The experience as a whole encourages us to extend this South–South partnership to the church in Angola. We are happy to do this because we have learned that no church is so weak and so small that it cannot be a true partner in mission and share its gifts and resources. We are still at the beginning, so it is too early to come to any conclusions or assess achievements. However, our experience has been such that we are determined to continue, bearing in mind the constant need to improve and evaluate our joint activities.

May God bless us, as partners in mission.

LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission
October 25 to 29, 1998, Nairobi, Kenya
***Track II:** Julius Filo - Forms of Mission Partnership in the Worldwide Lutheran Communion*

Forms of Mission Partnership in the Worldwide Lutheran Communion

Julius Filo

The mission we speak about is God's mission. It is the God of love, not we, who is the acting subject of mission, as proclaimed by the 'Fresh Call' from the recent Congress on the World Mission of the Church in St Paul, Minnesota, in visible theological harmony with the LWF Mission Statement.

This reflection strives to be inclusive of the global perspective of the consultation of which it is a part, but I shall not be able to hide my national background and my LWF international experiences. I come from a church which is the largest Lutheran church fulfilling its mission among the Slavic nations of Europe. It is a minority church in the country of Slovakia, 76 per cent of whose inhabitants are Christians (according to the 1991 official census). The Catholic Church is by far the largest in Slovakia. The church has a history of more than forty years' persecution until 1989. Now, however, we are living in a country of rapid transformation, offering great opportunities for the church, which is looking for new forms of mission and trying and enjoying several forms of partnership in mission.

Determining Factors

Forms of partnership depend on several factors which I want to highlight briefly. The general theological understanding of these issues and their specific missiological content in a respective country and region have a direct influence on the shape taken by the partnership in mission.

Understanding of the mission of the church and the missionary hope

In recent years the holistic understanding of mission has prevailed globally in our Lutheran communion. The practical application of this holistic approach to mission raises many questions. Our understanding of mission has a direct impact on the creation of specific forms of mission partnerships: How does the holistic mission understanding influence the specific forms of mission in our churches? Did all the dimensions of the holistic mission approach deserve adequate attention in our churches? Was evangelism the leading priority in our holistic mission understanding? Were we in this way obedient to Jesus Christ who came to grant salvation and eternal life to everybody and who has sent all of us to bring his life-giving gospel to all the nations?

Very often in our Lutheran congregations we lack mission quality, hope and activity. Satisfied with our own salvation in Christ, we enjoy our congregations as a good home for ourselves and we do not want to be disturbed by the world around us, suffering spiritual death and different forms of injustice. In our church in Slovakia we are engaging in a programme of missionary renewal of our congregations, the goal of which is to regain the missionary vision and quality of our faith. We are looking for such forms of partnership which will bring about this renewal for mission.

If mission dominates our church's life and programmes, we are not blind to the opportunities given to us in different times. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and most countries in the world, are presently undergoing deep socio-political changes. These changes represent a great chance to offer Christ's love to those who search. Are we able to encourage each other to be sensitive to missionary chances in our societies?

The opportunity for evangelistic efforts common to the whole world is the Great Jubilee of Christianity. The best expression of our gratitude to God for his son Jesus Christ will be our common action to create new effective forms of partnership in evangelism as part of God's mission in this world through our churches.

The quality of our missionary vision is the first and the most important determining factor for the development of any forms of partnership in mission.

Understanding of the Lutheran communion affects partnership programmes

The growing Lutheran communion represents a chance for our churches to develop new and strengthen old forms of mission partnerships. The theological and practical depth of the communion, as it is expressed in the everyday life of member churches, determines also how much it will affect the forms of our partnership programmes.

The creative role of the Lutheran communion as part of the identity of the respective churches can be seen, for example, in the eagerness to learn from the mission theology and missionary efforts and hopes of sister churches. The altar and pulpit fellowship definition of our communion means, according to the *Confessio Augustana VII*, an expression of the only true and important sign of the unity of the church. If this is understood with all its consequences, the Lutheran communion can be not only a platform for unlimited creative development of new forms of co-operation in mission, but can also bring about a living expression of the joint responsibility in mission on behalf of the member churches.

Does the theological and practical understanding of *communio* in the LWF function in this way? What are the obstacles which hinder the Holy Spirit to use the tool of the Lutheran communion for God's mission in the present world?

The Lutheran communion functions in our churches as a control mechanism when forms of partnership with other non-Lutheran churches are being explored and the so-called 'interdenominational' mission agencies offer their services to our churches. This has often been the case, especially in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, in recent years. To my knowledge, Lutheran churches consider these options in second place after those forms of partnership which arise from the Lutheran communion. The conflict accompanying these decisions, however, is created by the quality of the possible alternatives created in the partnership in the Lutheran communion or with another partner. The envisaged 'fruits' as the main standard of judgement according to the Bible, and the theological quality, adequate contemporary methods, often lead our churches (in my experience) to give preference to those forms of mission which arise from a partnership with a specialized missionary organization, which is not part of the Lutheran communion. What are the reasons for this? Is it a lack of knowledge about existing evangelistic organizations in worldwide Lutheranism? Is it the traditional geographically limited interest of the Lutheran mission agencies? Or is it the spiritually fresher and methodologically and culturally more attractive fruits of the interdenominational evangelistic networks?

Reasons for partnership

The *reasons* for partnership have to be genuine if they are to lead finally to authentic *forms* of partnership. The only genuine reasons for partnership are those revealed by the Bible. The interest to co-operate in mission has to come as the fruit of the Holy Spirit and as the expression of the churches' faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

Thankfulness for God's gifts leads to the desire to share them with others. The asymmetric distribution of God's resources for mission in the world calls for partnership and sharing. The church can, in fact, thank God for this asymmetry of distribution, because it creates the necessity to develop different forms of partnership and, thus, strengthen the unity of the church. The asymmetry of distribution of talents for mission, however, does not allow any asymmetry in partnership. It has to be guided by the equality of God's loved children and churches.

Any other 'worldly' reasons for mission partnership are not satisfactory and if they become the major factor, they may become counter-productive and destroy the partnership and the mission of the church. There are many historical examples of mission partnership leading to domination over nations which serve as a strong warning to us. To study one's own missiological history is an important effort in this regard. Therefore, we have to choose partners who have the same theological reasons and goals for partnership. Spiritual compatibility of partners is a decisive factor for the development of responsible forms of partnership.

Forms of Partnership Arising from the Full Communion

In the history of the LWF, many encouraging forms of partnership have developed, some of which I will describe briefly.

Churches sharing missionary resources in partnership

The most effective forms of partnership are those aiming at strengthening a respective church in its own mission efforts. This basic principle represents the main dimension of Christian partnership since it is looking for the best for the partner. It supports the capacities of the mission partner allowing their development and growth. Sharing missionary resources with the mission partner in the respective mission field is the principal form of mission partnership.

Such mission support is rightly called a partnership since it benefits all the co-operating parties. What are the main instruments of sharing in this process?

- *Human resources.* Receiving missionaries in the respective countries to support our mission represents the most valuable form of mission support. Let me use an example from our own church in Slovakia.

  Seven years ago our church opened three new secondary schools. During the communist regime it was forbidden for churches in our country to run schools. The question was raised: How could church schools contribute best to the existing network of state schools? The answer was to organize bilingual schools. The valuable partnership with our sister church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and other churches interested in this partnership, such as the LCMS and, recently, also the Presbyterian Church in America, has led to the establishment of these schools. Slovak youth can acquire at these schools an excellent level of English, a solid general secondary education, both in English and Slovak, benefit from the new and fresh spirituality of the American teachers and their pedagogical approaches, and spend five years at a school with inviting Christian spirituality. The success of this form of partnership would not be guaranteed without the permanent presence of American missionaries, who are considered equal with their Slovak colleagues and receive the same salaries as Slovak professors.

  The presence of missionaries, who become equal partners in the same project, is the vehicle for the irreplaceable transfer of spiritual gifts which cannot be compared to any of he financial transfers taking place between the churches.

- *Experiences in mission.* Sharing of experiences in mission takes place particularly at consultations, during visitations and through printed reports and missiological materials in the LWF family. This is particularly a task of the Lutheran World Federation. Consultations on the global and regional levels, focusing on the changing setting of our mission and new ways for evangelism, could also be one of the ways to awaken our churches for evangelism at this challenging time.

- *Visitation programmes*, e.g. of representatives of mission-minded youth, represent a very powerful tool in the mission experiences sharing process. The former African president of the LWF, Bishop Kibira from Tanzania, said in an interview after leaving office that among his wishes for the LWF were for visitations of grassroots representatives, especially youth, on the global level. This sharing through visitation programmes is one of the visible signs of our partnership, leading us (as I experienced in Africa during such a visitation about ten years ago) to people in the congregations, and to share also the way of life, witness and celebration with the people of the country.

- *Material and financial resources*. Material and financial resources are richly shared in the Lutheran World Federation, and we can probably say that because of this feature of our partnership in mission many other Christian bodies recognize in Lutheranism a commitment to communion. An insider, however, sees many problems in this sharing process. Who sets the priorities? This was one of the important questions with which we have struggled during the last Council meeting in Geneva. The Council sets programme priorities, but the funding of programmes and projects is not secured through such decision. The process is difficult; personal contacts, reports and interventions help in a limited way, because there are also longstanding commitments from bilateral partnerships' preferred geographical areas. The difficult but necessary question is how should this sharing of resources in the LWF be made more sensitive and flexible to the changing opportunities for our joint mission activities?

Churches learning mission together

The placement of educational institutions for mission should be made intentionally in the midst of churches/congregations, which are active in evangelism, diaconia and advocacy, so that all the specific features of holistic mission are studied, not only academically, but also experienced and practised during the educational process.

The task of a theological education which will give a missionary dimension to all aspects of the ministry of the church is an important one and should be considered together in the framework of the LWF. The often criticized self-satisfactory spirituality of our congregations is mostly the result of existing theological education. It is often oriented too much towards historical issues, preservation of inherited ways and care of existing members, rather than trying to evoke the hope for growth, gaining of new members and disciples and changing the world with the power of the gospel.

Churches using together their own mission tools (organizations)

Many LWF member churches do not have the financial resources to prepare and send missionaries to other countries. As a result of their spirituality and prayers for mission, members of these churches make a commitment to and look for practical ways of implementation of such

a mission call. I come from one such country and church. The prayer fellowship of our church keeps this concern as a top priority. Not having a mission organization, or a mission field abroad, we hope to be able to co-operate with one of the mission organizations in the larger churches to support their efforts with our people.

Are mission agencies going to be open to such partnership in mission? Can such a partnership one day include the preparation and call of missionaries from both sending and receiving countries on equal terms?

The role of bilateral forms of partnership and the forms created together in the Lutheran communion

Bilateralism used to be a criticized form of partnership competing with global partnership such as via the LWF. The experiences with several of our bilateral partners shows, however, that bilateral partnerships represent an important addition to the communion lived out through the LWF. Bilateral partnerships, understood as part of the same communion, concretize the communion and intensify contacts, often regularly in the congregations, as well. Partnership with the Evangelical Churches in Wuerttemberg and Thuringia has brought to our church and to them regular contact, not only at the level of church leadership but also at the level of deaneries, many congregations and between youth, women, pastors and diaconia organizations. The Lutheran communion needs the kind of deepening of its life as may happen through bilateral partnerships.

Forms of Partnership Based on a Common Goal

Churches accept offers of other churches and mission organizations

A common goal is often the base for partnership in mission outreach. The specific requirements and setting of the mission often lead churches, their specialized organizations or even interdenominational mission organizations to the decision to form a partnership. Let me mention a few successful and positive examples of which I am aware.

- The need for evangelization through electronic media after the political openings for the mission of our church in Slovakia has led to co-operation with the Lutheran Laymen's League of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), which has a rich experience in its Luther Hour programme. This programme, which became domestic and adapted to the needs in our country, has also been instrumental in starting a mission outreach ministry to the Roma (Gypsy) population. Our Roma mission efforts in Slovakia have been supported through the presence of an LCMS pastor of Roma background from the USA, with whom broad-scale Bible study programmes have been started.

A clear co-operation agreement in these cases is much more important than in the case of co-operation with an LWF member church, since, in the above case, the motivation, forms and goals of the partnership have to be studied and defined.

- According to the Message of the Congress on the World Mission of the Church, St Paul, USA, 1998, 'Approximately one thousand expatriate Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic agencies are engaged in mission in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, including residential and nonresidential efforts'. Many of them are youth oriented and some of them came in and offered their services to youth leaders and churches even before the collapse of the communist system of control. The issue of mission and evangelism as the holy goals of the church brought these often 'unidentified missionary objects' to an informal and later even formalized partner co-operation with parts of churches or whole churches. The expertise in youth ministry, the proclaimed and fulfilled goal to strengthen the churches in their mission and the strong commitment to the growth of the church was a convincing testimony.

Partnership for the benefit of socio-economic and political change

The common goal to contribute to the transformation of the socio-economic climate of the world, to overcome hunger and injustice, globally and nationally, brings the LWF and its member churches to many other forms of partnership. Their goal is immediate or long-term assistance to at least relieve part of the suffering or to enhance self-reliance. It was, and is, very important for the completeness of our mission that we dare to enter into such partnership. It should be our goal, however, to carry also in these forms of partnership the signs of our different motivation and hopes.

Did we succeed to be holistic in our mission understanding in these programmes? What kind of forms of partnership did we create? Even if we could say that, thanks to God, we have fed the hungry and supported the needy in their needs, we could do even more in the future by communicating the reasons and hopes behind our ministry which are in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in our partnership with others.

The Lutheran communion has a missionary quality and mandate. Thanks be to God that we have this instrument of mission, the LWF. I strongly believe that it can in the future develop even more and deeper forms of living partnership in mission.

Joint Mission Partners

Hannes Gänssbauer

Introduction

It is well known that ventures, programmes and projects which are jointly owned usually yield less profit: the communal coffee garden is usually not as well cared for as the private one in the backyard of our house.

I still remember those ideologies of the 1950s and 1960s which proclaimed the ideal match of socialist ideas and communal/clan/tribe-oriented development projects. According to the prevailing ethos of the time, mixing Western socialism with African and Asian communality – in which the individual is less important than the family, the clan and the tribe – simply *had* to be a recipe for success. Today, we know better.

More than anything else, it was probably economic circumstances that brought about the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. What became known as 'socialism in its really existing form' (literally translated) in East Germany failed as much economically as it did ideologically. Despite the dream of a mixture of Christianity and socialism, the sad result today is this insight: if Karl Marx and his followers erred in one respect, it was in their ideas about *human nature.* In other words, nothing succeeds like success. Such success usually stems from the basic notion that people are only motivated and ready to work hard, to involve themselves, to fully invest all their gifts and abilities, if it is for personal gain. What does this imply for the concept of joint mission partners?

It could imply that if partners jointly own a mission project it probably means that nobody feels fully responsible for it in the long run: like the communal coffee garden, it will become full of weeds and badly neglected.

When we commemorated a century of Lutheran mission work in Papua New Guinea, I contacted one of the more dedicated church leaders of a Highland region. He appealed to me as a representative of those who brought the Good News to this remote corner of the world to see to it that our garden, the garden we once planted, does not deteriorate or fall into disarray; to keep tending and weeding it, because after all it is *our garden.* Responsibility for it rests mainly with those from the original mission society, from the church which today is a partner. We are ready to help you, he said, with all our gifts and abilities and we gladly and eagerly do it, but in the long run it is *your responsibility to look after your garden,* as you once started this work (*The Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea: The First Hundred Years*, ed. H. Wagner and H. Reiner, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1986).

I am sometimes afraid that what my friend in Papua New Guinea tried to impress upon me is also known by many church leaders when they plead passionately for support with representatives of mission departments and churches who originally started mission work in their church or their area.

This is what I should like to call *stage one*: a Western mission society owns the mission and local co-workers in Africa, Asia and Latin America happily work alongside it.

The World Mission Conference in Bangkok (1973), mainly on the initiative of some prominent African church leaders, introduced the subject of a 'moratorium' on sending missionaries and material support from the North to churches in the South, in order to provide scope for church leaders in the South to take independent decisions and get priorities right in their own churches and to *own their own obligation for mission.* To the best of my knowledge the proposal did not lead to a massive reduction in the number of missionaries, nor to a massive decrease in material support. However, it was a clear signal, if not a desperate call, directed at Western partners, to allow space for God's sake to partners in the South to breathe, to plan and to strategize independently of Western personnel and capital.

I am also unaware of any particular missionary endeavours and initiatives that emerged from the churches in the South as a consequence of this call for a moratorium.

I am pretty sure that it was the inner dynamics of the incarnation of God's message that greatly diminished Western dominance. The gospel spoke and was active, found expression in African, Asian and Latin American cultures, customs, ways of life, languages, pictures and metaphors. The real impulse for the life and activities of local churches no longer rested on repeating the West's customary highly theoretical sermon, but on local testimonies amid the trial and error of millennarian movements, cargo cults and strange expectations of salvation. The big international theme of salvation or welfare healed communities over against individual salvation.

Preaching and understanding the gospel were so thoroughly determined by one's own culture, spirituality and life situation that while Western structures and forms of organization were retained, in some quite automatic way the church, in its living together with its neighbours, in its singing and other Christian expressions, became so local that its actual mission was fully owned by local churches and congregations, sometimes *despite* the overwhelming presence of Western missionaries.

This, in short, is the *second stage* of mature partnership, where the local church asserts its right to and displays its competence in owning and doing its mission. (A shining example of this development is in the People's Republic of China.)

Towards the end of the period 1984 to 1988 the 'missionary Bible' of the Lutheran churches was formulated in 'Together in God's Mission', which basically reflects the theological concept of

the mission of the triune God, our participation in this mission, and the view that the 'primary responsibility for responding to mission challenges in a given area rests with the local church' (second guideline for joint action on mission). If we take this seriously, of necessity it cannot be mission in *joint* partnership because the local church is definitely privileged – as the Lutheran Mission Statement puts it – with 'the primary responsibility'. And if 'joint' means *equal* partners, we have to state here and now that at best some are more equal than others: the leadership in and the responsibility for mission in its own backyard rests with the local church (full stop).

This is the inner dynamic, the theological and missiological basis for co-operation. As an officer who is involved in many an international relationship, I have also to look at the *actual and historical development* of partnership in models and within structures.

In the very beginning there was the 'Mission Society' with its mission field, almighty directors, and regional kings of field inspectors and other supervisors. There was the mighty and all-embracing mission organization – I know what I am talking about as in my apprenticeship years I was part of the biggest ever international mission organization in the South Pacific, Lutheran Mission New Guinea, which not only owned warehouses and shops but also aeroplanes and ships in such organizations like Lutheran Shipping and Luther Air.

However, it is interesting to note that this early stage of mission co-operation represented *international co-operation between Western mission partners,* which was reverently watched with astonished eyes by its object, the representatives of local churches. Its remnants can still be detected today, like the organization of Lutheran Missionaries in Japan which owns land and buildings and makes capital investments (Shadan); the Berlin Mission, which virtually runs a High School in Israel/Palestine by the name of Talitha Kumi; and the officers/advisers of big church development organizations which act like former 'mission inspectors' in Southern Africa, Central America and Asia.

When the first bishops from America, Germany and Sweden were replaced by local bishops, the local church tried to cope with all their historical partners at one time and through one instrument. These were the years of the instruments of international co-operation, when one local church in the South dealt with many partners from the North like Lutheran Coordination Service, Tanzania (LCS), Committee of Mutual Christian Responsibility, Ethiopia (CMCR), EP (now ELCSA Ecumenical Partners, at that time ELCSA European Partners, South Africa), Coordination Committee of Overseas Partners, Jordan/Palestine (COCOP), Lutheran Mission Coordination in India (LMCI), New Guinea Coordination Committee (NGCC), Lutheran Committee for Cooperative Mission, Japan (LCM), etc. And it was in all humility – as we at the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany had no direct 'mission field' – that a contribution came from VELKD and my predecessors like Horst Becker and the current LWF President, Bishop Christian Krause, who assisted at the birth of a lot of these instruments and fora of international co-operation which still operate today in the international Lutheran community (together, of course, with Director Henrik Smedjebacka and now Bishop Rune Backlund, to name just a few).

One of the prominent features of these instruments of co-operation is the attempt to enable all the Western mission partners to co-operate with one church in the South, an attempt to bring together somehow the different approaches, policies and priorities of free Scandinavian mission societies and the mission departments of America and Western Europe for joint co-operation. To enable a local church in the South to co-operate with up to fifteen mission and development partners, many of whom still maintain bilateral ties with churches and parts of churches and with whom they may have co-operated for more than a century, is no mean achievement.

This is the present stage of international co-operation between Lutheran churches all over the world. There is one basic difference between the old models of the 1960s like LCS, NGCC and COCOP and the new models like LMC Tanzania, the partners' forum of the ELC–PNG and the Ethiopian CMCR, to name just a few: the so-called older models mainly focused on co-ordination and co-operation between overseas partners *vis-à-vis* the local church. This is what I should like to call the exclusive model.

Unfortunately, the only model of international partnership co-ordination which I chair – COCOP – is still working along the lines of joint decision-making among overseas partners only. One can try to operate it *de facto* more in the spirit of mutuality by including reports by all churches in co-operation, i.e. also the Scandinavian, West European and American partners. In this way the impression of inspectors checking on the work of the local Southern church which has to report about its activities is corrected or balanced. But when one works within the old structures, when it comes to decision-making, the Southern church is formally excluded. (As a result, we decided in 1998 to restructure COCOP.) This is the reason for using the terms *inclusive* and *exclusive* models of co-operation. I dare to make a statement of principle at this juncture:

Any model of church-to-church co-operation that does not allow for *joint decision-making* is not only outdated but also lacks the equality and reciprocity which are of course not only the sociological prerequisites but also the theological prerequisites for the equal rights and equal dignity of all God's children.

So in practical terms the task ahead of most of us is to create inclusive models of co-operation among equals.

Again being practical I can point to the new structure of co-operation between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) and its international partners, the Lutheran Mission Coordination in Tanzania (LMCT), where we tried – in joint consultations over many years under the spiritual leadership and guidance of ELCT, but always in open and critical exchange with the international partners – to create a new joint instrument of co-operation qualified as an instrument for *joint planning* (overseas partners are already involved at a very early stage in planning programmes and projects of ELCT and its dioceses), *joint support* (a common basket which receives contributions from *all* partners, local and overseas, is jointly allocated), *joint decision-making* and *joint implementation and evaluation.* We are all eager to learn whether and

how this highly structured model of co-operation will be a platform for more open and transparent co-operation and joint decision-making among equal partners. Even if it works perfectly, I see two problems right away.

The first problem has to do with dwindling financial resources in the North. This will inevitably mean that just when we have a fine instrument for joint decision-making (as regards, for example, missionary priorities in Tanzania or in one of the overseas partner churches, let us say an urban programme in Chicago, Uppsala or Hamburg), we simply lack the finances to implement our decisions when we have attended to the normal requirements of running our churches and their institutions. In other words, with ever-scarcer finances we can only concentrate on the most basic tasks in our churches and cannot afford additional missionary activities. Here, of course, open and frank discussion is required about what are the most basic tasks and priorities of a church. Should these comprise maintaining institutions and normal routine work, or should we turn first to mission activities? Language can be quite revealing. I speak of 'additional missionary activities' and 'normal activities'. Should not mission be counted as the most normal and natural activity of a church?

The second problem – and in missiological terms a much bigger problem – is that this fine model of co-operation is again an exclusive model in so far as it only includes the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and its traditional non-African partners. A model that takes seriously the prime responsibility of the local church for mission in its own context (the second guideline of 'Together in God's Mission') and uses and involves its international partners with all their resources in support of its mission (fourth guideline), still remains *exclusive* when it comes to *immediate neighbours* in Africa or the region. So even if we arrive at joint decision-making and co-operation among equals, the model of co-operation still remains incomplete or exclusive when it does not involve immediate neighbours. Even worse, it falls back into the trap of closely co-operating from Arusha or Johannesburg for that matter, with Chicago, Helsinki, Uppsala, Hermannsburg or Neuendettelsau and not with Nairobi, Lilongwe, Addis Ababa or Antananarivo.

In other words, a church in East Africa can still concentrate on its original mission partners and be involved in Germany, Sweden, Denmark or the USA as a member church in the international partnership on the level of LMCT and have no contacts whatsoever with, let us say, its Lutheran fellow-Christians in Uganda, Burundi, Malawi or Kenya.

To overcome this exclusiveness determined by the traditional partners of a certain church, models of co-operation should always involve neighbouring Lutheran churches in the African and Asian region, just as the small co-ordinating body for Mozambique (Joint Mission Board for Mozambique) involves representatives from South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, as well as from Brazil (which introduces another important category: not only neighbouring countries in the region but preferably partner churches from other so-called third world contexts). I am told that this is also the case with co-operation between the small Lutheran church in Thailand (LMT)

and its international partners, which include Asian Lutheran churches in Japan, Malaysia and Hong Kong, besides partners in Finland (FELM) and Norway (NMS).

This is exactly the point at which the regional expressions of the LWF communion become extremely important. They should not become or remain solely an instrument for closer and smoother co-operation with headquarters in Geneva. I dream of the time when the Lutheran Communions in Southern Africa, Eastern Africa and Western Africa (LUCSA, LUCCEA, LUCWA) and the Asian regional co-ordination in the Chopstick, Sattay or Sweet Potatoes group join forces for a really joint mission endeavour. I shall not tire of advocating for LUCSA a joint programme of mission co-operation with, for example, the newly emerging Lutheran church in Angola. We could use literature and liturgical material from Brazil and Mozambique; experiences of church leadership from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana; theological expertise from the same countries; pastors, evangelists and teachers from all LUCSA member churches; and financial and logistical support from LUCSA international partners in Europe and America to start this joint mission endeavour. (Or – to move to a different situation – missionary and church co-operation from all the member churches of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India and its overseas partners in the USA and Europe (LMCI), to join hands and resources to work in Nepal, for example.)

One other aspect is important in international co-operation. In his book *The Partnership and Power* (Makumira Publications, 1996, Erlangen), jointly written with Eila Helander, Wilson Niwagila very pointedly stresses the recommendation that it is of central importance to know the *theological basis of partnership.* I hoped desperately to say something about the foundations of our partnership when we worked on the structure of LMC Tanzania; unfortunately, we ended up with a very minimal statement (see LCS–LMC Manual 1998, Arusha, page 152). Wilson Niwagila says: 'This theology should be the primary factor that shapes how the partners perceive the relationship and their own role in it.' It should be the subject of constant scrutiny and evaluation whether our partnership is built on mutually agreed foundations (*Partnership and Power*, p. 141).

If we take this important criterion seriously, many written regulations of mutual co-operation fall short of its basic requirements. To the best of my knowledge there is a clear theological description of the basis of their joint co-operation provided in the 'Mission Statement of Mutual Cooperation Between the ELC–PNG and Overseas Partner Churches'.

The general standard partnership agreement between ELC–Jordan and its international partners is – for the mid-1970s – quite an enlightened vision of partnership, impressive particularly for its obvious flexibility and readiness to involve itself in a worldwide process of learning and attempting to understand 'the change that is taking place in the understanding of mission'. I like this, particularly as I believe in our international fellowship as a communion of Christian sisters and brothers open to a process of continued learning.

Challenging Dimensions of Mission

Musimbi Kanyoro

I speak to you from my home country, Kenya, and therefore I find it appropriate to begin by telling you a Kenyan story which I think illustrates one of the many challenging dimensions of mission. I chose a story in which Lutherans are participants.[1]

Mission in 1846

The first foreign Christian missionaries in Kenya were two German Lutheran men named Johann Ludwig Krapf and Johann Rebmann. They came as missionaries to the coast of Kenya under the auspices of the Anglican Church Missionary Society. They opened their first church in 1846 in a place called Rabai, 20 kilometres from the port of Mombasa. They invited the local people to church and legend says that fifteen responded. When the service was over, Krapf and Rebmann were curious to hear the reaction of the people. The reaction was anything but enthusiastic. The people were invited to come back the next Sunday and they responded with a clear and decisive 'No'. This annoyed the missionaries, so they pressed the people for their reasons. The people responded by saying that what they had just attended was not worship. They explained that when they gathered for worship, they slaughtered an animal; people ate, drank, sang and drummed and were happy because they were worshipping. Krapf and Rebmann told the people that their words, thoughts and actions were those of sinners.

The people nevertheless did not return the next Sunday. We can only guess that perhaps they were reacting to a typically solemn Lutheran church service, the strange language, or even the poor imagery used by the new missionaries, who were still learning the Rabai language. The contents of this worship must have been strangely uninteresting. The 'good news' that Krapf and Rebmann thought they were bringing did not sound good to the Warabai. When Krapf and Rebmann introduced Jesus as the Son of God when they told the Warabai about God's love, the people reacted with astonishment. Why did they need a son to tell them about God's love when they already knew that God loved them? God had provided them with rain, food and cattle, children and the sun and the moon! What could be more proof of God's love? Of course God loved them! And so it was a long time before these coastal people ever became Christians. This region of Kenya still has relatively few Christians, as many of the people worship God in their own traditional religions and some eventually converted to Islam.

What could one do differently today from what the two Lutheran men did in 1846? What was the actual issue that hindered the communication of the gospel in this encounter? Has communication in mission improved in the 1990s?

Mission in 1990

In 1990 another missionary came to Kenya, this time from Finland. He found the thriving Uhuru Lutheran Church. After four years of his service in the church, many members had left. He, too, told the Africans that they were sinners, which is why they could not agree with his portrayal of God and his description of the means to God. In 1997 he was withdrawn by his mission in Finland and afterwards the church once again began to thrive, this time with a missionary from the USA. What was the difference between the two? One believed that sinners should be sent away from the church, while the other believed that sinners belong to the church.

Mission in an Age of Uncertainty and Pluralism

Explanations abound as to how differences in cultural contexts of mission have always been sources of mis-communication. But with the above illustrations in mind I wish to debate the issues surrounding two 'definitions' of mission: (1) mission as sharing the good news and (2) mission as spiritual and cultural imperialism.

One of mission's clearest dimensions is evangelistic. The missionaries of the nineteenth century were positive that they wanted to make Christians out of all other people. In obedience to the great commission (Matthew 28:18–20) they went out of their way to save the pagans and the people of other faiths. There was no question, then, as to any possibility that there might be truth, integrity or value in religious traditions different to those the missionaries understood and believed Christianity to embody. Their world was neatly divided into Christians and pagans. This certainty has been badly shaken today, even for the most fiery evangelist. Today people ask: is heaven really reserved only for people who think and behave in a certain uniform way? Are the creeds and scriptures of the Christian church the limit of God's grace? Today, when we have exhaustive knowledge and an expanded consciousness of the variety of religious expression in the world, can we really insist on yesterday's limited religious exclusivism? 'Is the Christian claim to be the one universal faith by which all persons relate authentically to God still credible?'[2]

These questions are not only difficult to answer but more difficult for the institutional church to face. For the institutional church, evangelism is the 'cutting edge of mission'.[3] The institutional church is in crisis because it is built on the foundation of certainty and when that certainty is questioned, the foundation shakes. Uncertainty can lead to hopelessness and a feeling of moral relativity: should the church admit that Christianity might after all hold only a partial truth? But if the church does not debate this issue, then how do we propose to discover anything new from the many examples similar to those of the Lutheran German missionaries and the Warabai people? When people demand to be heard from their own perspective how is the evangelistic task of mission to be carried out? This is not an easy question. It must not be easily dismissed.

The church cannot escape the haunting question, 'How can one talk about Christ in a pluralistic society?' Although the command for mission is biblical, doing mission in the twenty-first century poses many such questions and provides few answers. It requires that a link be made between what it means to read the Bible and how we respond to it; not simply by standing in the world, but ensuring a proper dialogue between biblical material and what is going on in the world. In some ways, today is not that different to the time of the early church, which provides a model for mission. But how does the ambiguity of our time and our cultures shape our understanding of how the Spirit of God is still at work in God's world? We might push this question a little further and ask: how does the intertwining of religion and culture in any particular context affect the attitudes of Christians to other forms of belief and other living faiths?

We stand at a unique point in the history of the church and its mission task. In the past churches safely saw their responsibilities in proclamation, fellowship and service as clear definitions of their reason to exist. Today, groups targeted as receivers of mission question the agenda of the church. These groups define themselves as the marginalized. They seek to move their own agenda from the margins to the mainstream. Target groups for mission will increasingly locate themselves at the centre of mission debate and define the future of mission. For example, the indigenous communities are loud and clear in their rejection of a Christianity that does not respect their cultural base.

One of the most visible challenges to Christianity today is not the missionized world but the secular societies of Europe and North America. A large group of people living in a once-Christianized world have no roots in the past, present or future of Christianity. These people struggle to make sense of their lives through what they do and what they have here and now. If Christianity is to make sense for them, it will have to be what Paul described as 'all things to all people'.[4] The missionary zeal of the nineteenth century no longer provides the modern evangelist and missionary with the security and luxury of being the sole vendor of truth.

Challenges for Doing Mission

Since the beginnings of the church a number of questions have been asked constantly, either out loud or silently. 'How does the church handle difference: those who are different, those who eat different food, those who worship differently, those who hear the word of God speak to them differently? What can Christian evangelists do and say and what should they not do or say? These sorts of questions come alive in the church today when it has to face differences encountered in the increasingly diverse theological stances on ethics, morals and the authority of the Bible. Even a seemingly positive statement such as 'Being an inclusive and open church' sends shivers down some people's spines. How inclusive can the church be? Inclusive to whom and why?

What can we learn from our world and from the Bible about how to continue to communicate and proclaim the gospel across boundaries and frontiers of difference? Where are the limits of Christian freedom in a world in which societies describe themselves as secularized, postmodern, post-Christian, pluralistic etc.? The call to the church to do mission still requires it to proclaim the good news about Jesus, the Christ; to teach, baptize and nurture believers in the gospel. In doing mission, the church has a responsibility to respond to human need in loving service and to seek to transform injustices in our societies. Mission for the church also includes a concerted effort to safeguard the integrity of all God's creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Have these words become meaningless for us? Are they the systematized and synthesized statements of academic lunatics or are they still the vocabulary of the church?

I believe that we must always go back to the Bible for answers to our questions. In the second letter of Paul to Timothy, he writes 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16–17; NRSV).

Discernment as a Method of Doing Mission

It seems to me that the major challenge currently facing the church is to do with the religious explosion and proliferation of many kinds of belief. Atheism, religious indifference and cultural and religious pluralities remain important, but the most intractable issue in our so called postmodern world is *what* to believe and *who* to believe.[5] It is very easy to take sides and pronounce some things wrong and others right, otherwise we remain in some form of relativism with which it is difficult to live. I think the Bible calls for discernment rather than knowledge and indecision. This can be illustrated by the Corinthian struggle with food taboos and Paul's example as a missionary, as told in 1 Corinthians 8, 9 and 10.

Christian converts came from both pagan and Jewish backgrounds, so we would expect that some conflict would arise while they sought to understand what their new faith required of them. The Corinthians asked Paul if Christians should or should not eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Paul responded in a rather round about way. In chapters 8 and 9 he says that it is acceptable to eat such meat unless by so doing Christians with a weak conscience are scandalized. However, in chapter 10 he warns that eating meat connected with idol worship will provoke the Lord.

Some among the Corinthian Christians argued that it was all right for a Christian to eat food sacrificed to idols. They reasoned that, after all, an idol has no real existence. If one is a monotheist one does not accept the ontological reality of idols: 'Indeed, even though they may be so called gods in heaven or on earth – as in fact there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the father from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom we exist' (1 Corinthians 8:5–6; NRSV).

This group drew their inspiration from the creed 'There is no God but one', as described in 1 Corinthians 8:4–7; 10:23 – 11:1. They saw no problem in eating such meat because 'an idol has no real existence'. They were conversant with the scriptures, which they were able to quote: 'All things are lawful', as scripture implies (1 Corinthians 10:23–6). They were also familiar with the law and the individual freedom of Christians, so they reasoned that one Christian's liberty should not be determined by another person's problems. Alongside this confident, knowledgeable group, however, there was a weaker, fragile group of people who were troubled by the thought of eating meat offered to idols, because for them such idols were real. Does this sound as familiar to you as it does to me?

A Question of Process

The process by which Paul responded to the concerns of the Corinthian church is for me more significant for my quest to understand the requirements of doing mission in various contexts than his specific replies. Paul begins with an affirmation: *all of us possess knowledge* and that is a good thing, but this is *not* what Christian mission is about. The problem with knowledge-based conduct is that it can lead to pride: 'Knowledge puffs up'! In other words, Paul is saying, yes we have knowledge about monotheism, which by its very nature rules out idols. We also have knowledge about food, that it makes no difference to God what we eat. But the aim of Christian ethics is not stoic self-sufficiency. It is not just what we know! God has not given us all the answers to the complex issues we face, but God gives us a world full of excitement and possibilities, plus the capacity as human beings to live with these many possibilities! Further, Paul argues that our knowledge is confined to what *we* know or think we know, but there is something more at stake than our limited knowledge. What is crucial in the relationship with God is being elected by God, which means being known by God, not what we know about each other or ourselves. The question we must ask is this: does God know us? In other words does God know the missionary and the missionee? Does God recognize the person who carries the good news and the person for whom the good news is intended? Does God recognize us in our acts of doing mission?

Paul disputes the legitimacy of basing Christian conduct on knowledge. He actually says that knowledge does not build us up, and that it destroys others. Christian mission is about love. 'Love builds up.' Love aims at benefiting the other. Paul, in this text, is not concerned with the failure of the Corinthians to love God, but rather with their failure to act in love with those in their community who do not share their knowledge. Perhaps this is the analysis that one might make of the encounter between the two German Lutherans and the Warabai people. If that story and the texts from Corinthians are to help us today, we must ask what are the challenging dimensions of mission which require the church to act in love. Let me suggest a few answers.

Challenging Dimensions of Mission

I should like to summarize the results of the preparatory work of the World Council of Churches for World Mission Conference in Salvador, Brazil in November 1996 as follows:[6]

> The gospel is being witnessed to many more cultures now than ever before. These many cultures are coming into closer contact with one another. Multicultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multilingual societies are emerging on an unprecedented scale, heightening questions of cultural identity and creating conflicts among cultures. Many people whose cultural identity had not been challenged find themselves in a minority, and those whose cultures had been suppressed even under the umbrella of the gospel are finding new ways to protest against what is seen to be cultural and religious colonization. Marginalized people name their quest for identity as a struggle for justice.
>
> The tensions that arise among these different groups in their search for recognition and identity manifest themselves in various ways. The peoples of the world are pleading with the missionary church to tell the story of Jesus today in the many diverse cultures and languages so that the people of our times may hear the voice of God and come to know the grace of the gospel.

Solidarity groups, bound together by poverty, ethnicity, language, gender, environmental concerns, indigenous origins, sexual orientation, human rights interests, etc., require fundamental changes in the powers, procedures, methods, forms and content of 'doing Mission'. People in these groups look to the church to take up their issues as a means of proclaiming justice commensurate with God's option for those in the margins. In *The Church in the Round* (1993)[7] Letty Russell underscores the fact that the gospels are shamingly clear about the option and priority of God's justice. It is the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, the merciful who are blessed. According to the beatitudes as recorded in Luke and Matthew, those who see their need for God, those who would otherwise be considered different by the dominant values of society, are the blessed ones in the reign of God. These are the strangers in the church and they are often the targets for mission. Jesus opts for these strangers, not because they are more righteous or more sinful, but because they are the ones who help us know when justice is done. These people are the new community in Christ.

Poverty and Mission

The world is made up of those who have everything and those who have nothing. There are unimaginable numbers of men, women and children all over the world who know neither shelter, food, security nor self-esteem. Poverty has the face of displaced persons, immigrants, refugees,

street children and even people who live in their place of birth but with no home and no food. The misery caused by wars and turmoil compels churches to co-ordinate efforts in diaconia, just as fifty years ago ecumenical organizations were formed in the aftermath of the Second World War. Such mission efforts invite ecumenical co-operation. The Book of Acts illustrates the possibilities in an ecumenical solidarity which is realized when people share their possessions according to the needs of the community.

Poor people challenge the mission work of the church to address the root causes of problems which dehumanize persons made in the image of God. Whether it be globalization or structural adjustment programmes, conflicts or wars, the faithfulness of the church must involve both advocacy and care for the victims. Julius Nyerere once wrote, 'If a human being is really the temple of God, we have to do something about the flies in the eyes of a child , as those flies are ruining God's temple'. 'We say man is created in the image of God. I refuse to imagine a God who is miserable, poor and ignorant, superstitious, fearful, oppressed and wretched.'[8]

Gender and Mission

Speaking from the perspective of my professional function, my understanding of mission and the church is shaped by the lives and stories of women, as told by real-life experience and in books by feminist theologians. Such women – their visions and their prophetic voices – surround me as relatives, friends, colleagues, Bible characters, the oppressed, the marginalized, clergy, child prostitutes, widows, political activists and so on. Some are mere girl children, while others are veritable historical monuments who have seen it all. Some are happy with who they are, while others are 'groaning in faith'[9] or struggling in anger and hope. Many of the women who have defined the church for me are 'living letters' of hope and streams of life-giving water to their families and communities.

My 'kairos' moment was when a group of African rural women described their programme of visiting the sick and poor in their community and rendering them help in the form of service, satisfying basic material needs, spiritual accompaniment in prayer and Bible reading, as 'the church in our lives'.[10] The leader of this group, a calm, composed woman wearing an ageing clean dress, responded to criticism from male church bureaucrats that the women were doing nothing, by simply saying, 'They do not see the church in our lives'. She continued to define the ministry they do as 'we care for one another every day'.

Whatever else I learn about mission in my exposure to missiology and mission consultations, or through reading some of the many exciting resources, it is the words of these African rural women that I wish to continue to exegete and nurture, so that they grow into an image that I, too, can utilize to express my faith in Jesus Christ, as I seek to be faithful to the Christian calling. Therefore, the definition I choose for myself is this: ministry is service that the community of God's people render to one another in order to honour the life that God has created by sustaining and nurturing it as co-workers with God.[11] The church is the context in which mission is lived

out. The church is the people who give and receive mission. The worship of the church is the celebration of God whose mission it is. The church is in the world to fulfil God's mission, in which both men and women are called to participate. Mission is inclusive in nature and in practice. Women and men participate in mission as laity and as ordained pastors.

Inclusiveness is an aspect of the justice of God, which Jesus restored in his concern for those on the fringes. The fact that gender roles differ significantly from one society to another and from one historical period to another is an indication that they are socially and culturally constructed. The social construction of roles and status relegates women to inferior positions, thus devaluing their dignity and humanity. This gender subordination is articulated through various institutions, both public and private. The subordination of women has been legitimized throughout history, in literature, art and folk stories told from one generation to the next. The socialization of all people, men and women alike, has continued to propagate the myth that women are inferior beings and, in some cases, less than human. This often results in legitimizing violence against women at the domestic level, in structures, in institutions, in sacred scriptures and other literature, and even by persons in authority such as fathers, priests, employers, presidents, etc. Violence against women, physical, philosophical and psychological is a mission content issue. Partnerships in mission which pretend that these things do not exist or find it difficult to table them for discussion need to re-examine their own sincerity in mission.

Sexuality and Mission

'Sex, sexuality? What is that? We Africans don't mention these words in public. We must be careful not to buy into another Western agenda.' This was the reaction when I tried to engage in debate a very respected African church leader, theologian and bishop about the sexual abuse of women in our societies and church. Our conversation took place before an audience of representatives from various churches globally, whose intention was to examine proposals made by an international group of church women. The committee in the end never really discussed the proposals or their implications for churches. My African brother bishop hijacked the meeting and instead engaged me in a debate about what it is and is not permissible to talk about in African culture. He went on to remind me that talking about sexuality is not African and words such as sexual abuse and sexual harassment are only relevant to Western society.

There are many issues relating to the sexual abuse of women which are a challenge to mission. They include child molestation, incest, rape (including spouse rape), trafficking in women, sex tourism, and all kinds of sexual harassment in church and society. In the past these issues were simply condemned as immoral and sinful. But today we know that mission requires that the church identify their causes and address them, not just with condemnation, but by working to eradicate them. What good is sin if it is not abandoned?

Of the many issues relating to human sexuality that concern the church today, I should like to mention one: the issue of homosexuality, brought to the church by gay men and lesbian women.

Many people in the church refuse to listen to these men and women, who are often wished away from church and society. Currently, homosexuality is one of the most divisive issues in the church. The Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, 1998 forced the question of homosexuality to be discussed by the churches. If the church wants to target gays and lesbians for mission then it needs the wisdom exhibited by Paul to the Corinthians. People in Corinth debated whether to pay attention to the views of others. They grumbled: 'But why should I worry about the rights of my brothers or sisters – what about my own rights, my own convictions, my own knowledge, and my own interpretation of the scriptures? Why should my freedom to act be limited by another's conscience?' Paul responded to these questions – and by extension our own questions – with four rhetorical questions of his own, each with an implied affirmative answer: 'Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?' (1 Corinthians 9:1).

Since 'yes' is the answer to all these questions, Paul asserts that although both reason and the law establish his rights, 'I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision'. The reasons for not claiming the rights are twofold: although he is free he has made himself a slave in order to win more, and to give the gospel freely to all. 'Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, because "we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Jesus Christ"'. Thus, for Paul, restraint has to be practised when mission is at risk. Mission is about caring for all people as they are, in all their need, not just as they may become; nor is it about caring only for those whom we know, with whom we agree and with whom we associate. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that food is a matter of indifference to God, but precisely because this is so, they must not use it as they are doing, to insist on rights and freedom. They must not let an insistence on rights bring about the fall of a brother or a sister. Thus, for me, the question of gays and lesbians in the church cannot be wished away; neither can conflicting opinions about sexual orientation and life styles be resolved by ignoring them. The mission of the church is incomplete if questions about human sexuality are not on its agenda.

Solidarity Groups

It is imperative that doing mission today should affirm the plurality of cultural and theological interpretations of people's experiences. This is not a choice but a contextual definition of mission. This understanding of plurality anticipates that there will be many methods for doing mission, just as there are many styles of cooking. Difference has been exploited over time to separate people by culture, gender, race, ethnic identity – the list goes on. Difference is a reality, but it need not be a liability.

Various people in their search for affirmation have often stressed the principles of equality and reciprocity. Partnership, community and togetherness are among the key words in conversations

between groups and peoples wanting to participate in mission, not just as souls for conversion but as whole persons. In our time people are looking for affirmations of difference that will lift oppression from all oppressed people. *It has to be justice, and not just us.* Difference exists even between people of the same sex or the same colour of skin.

In *God's Fierce Whimsy* an exchange of letters between Katie Cannon and Carter Hayward addresses the question, 'Can we be different and not alienated?'[12] They focus on the race differences between these two American women. They are both accomplished professors of theology, and both claim to do theology from women's perspective. Yet one is black and the other is white. Socio-economically, they belong to the same middle class. They found that assuming a commonality between them leads to false liberalism, which in turn poses other problems. By pretending that we are all the same, someone is rendered invisible in the process. There is also the danger of patronizing or appropriating the other's identity. In all of these instances power plays a major role. There is always a relationship of domination and subordination which underlies the choices that people make.

Women theologians have come to accept that truth is not the possession of any one person or tradition. Through feminist theology women the world over are struggling to admit and affirm difference. They are attempting to create space for the expression of difference. Ranjini Rebera, writing from Asia, states that 'To affirm differences and yet be open enough to move on to celebrating our strengths together, is a way forward to the establishment of "partnerships of equals"'.[13]

Conclusion

The church in Corinth seems no different from our own churches, wherever they are. We always live in tension between opinions. This is embarrassing in a world where knowledge is the badge of success. These scriptures shame us to humility if we have to do mission. The tyranny of knowledge, either as the basis for Christian ethics in the church or as the basis for progress, has a long and unfortunate history which has yielded the fruits of discomfort and distrust between churches and within churches, between South and North and between missionary sending churches and missionary receiving churches.

Mission has often been defined as proclamation, fellowship and service (*kerygma, koinonia* and *diaconia).* This is based on the first chapter of Acts, in which the apostles proclaim the gospel, found the churches and engage in diaconia. Mission is also defined as unity and as indigenization or inculturation of the gospel. While mission is primarily God's mission, it has also to be historical and take seriously the process of human history and development. Thus the church's mission must correlate to the times and be attuned to different ages, cultures, peoples and contexts.

Notes

1 This is a popular story in the church, but this version is adapted from Joseph Donders, *Non-Bourgeois Theology* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1986), 2.

2 Rosemary Radford Ruether poses this question and discusses it in great detail. She concludes that the Christian faith in its universal mission is in crisis. See 'Feminism and Jewish–Christian Dialogue', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

3 Raymond Fung's words in his article 'Evangelism in the Anglican Communion: An Ecumenical Perspective' in the report of the Mid-point Review of the Decade of Evangelism, *The Cutting Edge of Mission*, ed. Cyril C. Okorocha (London, Anglican Communion Publications, 1996), 145–52

4 See 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, where Paul argues that he has to be like every other person in order to be able to be a blessing to them. Jesus was accused of eating with tax-collectors and sinners. He did not avoid or condemn those who were different to him. What better model for Christians could there be than Jesus the Christ!

5 In ancient Corinth, sacrificing animals to the gods was part of the cultic worship life of the people. The sacrificial meat was divided into three parts: a token to be burned at the altar, a portion for priests or magistrates and the remainder used either for a banquet at the temple (in the case of private sacrifice) or sold to the public in shops for family meals (in the case of public sacrifices). For Jews, such food was prohibited because it was tainted by idolatry. Additionally, such meat was not slaughtered in the right way and a tithe had not been paid. It was therefore not religiously right for Jews to eat it. For the pagans (the term used for polytheistic societies) this was meat sacrificed for sacred purposes. It was sacred meat, good meat.

6 *Many Cultures, One Gospel* (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1996), 1.

7 Letty M. Russell, *The Church in the Round* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1993).

8 Quoted by Joseph Donders in *Non-Bourgeois Theology*, p. 163.

9 The phrase 'groaning in faith' is the title of a book of essays by African women theologians doing their theology in the multi-religious context of African indigenous religions, Islam and Christianity. This book was launched at the Bi-annual Institute of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, held in Nairobi, Kenya. *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*, ed. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge (Nairobi, Acton Publishers, 1996).

10 I have told the story of this experience in 'The Power to Name', in *The Power We Celebrate: Women's Stories of Faith and Power*, ed. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro and Wendy S. Robins (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1992).

11 The language I use, such as 'people of God' or 'Co-workers with God' comes from reading the theological works of many scholars, and I am not readily able to identify specific sources. However, I am currently reading the writings of professor Lewis S.

Mudge and also taking a class with him. He uses many such expressions and traces them to the original sources.

12 Mudflower Collective, *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological Education* (New York, Pilgrim Press, 1985).

13 Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's (1993) book *The Discipleship of Equals* is one recent and detailed study on the concept of equality in the church. Ranjini Rebera uses a similar concept in *Affirming Difference: Celebrating Wholeness, A Partnership of Equals* (Hong Kong, Christian Conference of Asia, 1995).

The Christian–Muslim Contexts in Africa

Joseph A. Ilori

Introduction

Africa is religiously pluralistic. In such a context conflict is clearly disastrous, but even peaceful coexistence is inadequate for meeting the urgent needs of our developing societies, which have a right to expect from Christians and Muslims good-will, a readiness to confer with one another, and an eagerness to co-operate in every possible way.

Muslims and Christians need each other's help to ease tension, secure justice, relieve pain, and otherwise promote the social, material and spiritual well-being of all people. This paper will therefore discuss the theological bases for Christian–Muslim relations and ideologies, the nature and aims of Christian–Muslim dialogue in Africa, and the meaning of and prospects for mission.

Theological Bases for Christian–Muslim Relations

The Bible stands on one firm foundation: there is one God, no other. There is therefore no person, no history, no culture, no spirituality which is outside God's creation and providence. A radical recovery of God as creator means that my Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim neighbour is still the child of God. God is as much his or her creator as mine, for there is no other God but the God who is the source of all life. It is this truth that undergirds the necessity for dialogue with people of other faiths.[1]

Christians and Muslims affirm that their respective faiths, properly understood, enjoin all adherents to a loving relationship with each other and with all human beings. The ground and impetus for this relationship is no less than the one God, who has made all human beings brothers and sisters. Muslims emphasize that God the Compassionate (Al-Rahman) and the Beloved (Al-Habib) commands the faithful to be merciful, compassionate and loving in their dealings with everyone. The Qu'ran embodies this command and specifies ways in which the faithful may obediently comply with it.

Christians, for their part, emphasize that God's love is demonstrated in God's self-giving in and through the person of Jesus Christ, who both inspires and enables their loving relationship with

all humankind. Responding to God's love in Jesus Christ, Christians find the example and basis for this love in their social dealings with all people. Thus, allowing for these specific differences in understanding, both Islam and Christianity find their ethical mandate in the all-merciful God who loves and is loved.[2]

Christianity and Islam, along with Judaism, are in a special relationship with each other. They belong to the spiritual family of Abraham (nabi-Ibrahim). Both seek to be faithful and strive to be obedient in accordance with God's command and in response to God's grace or favour. Christianity and Islam have many theological and ethical convergences and similarities. While in the not-so-distant past, Christianity and Islam accentuated their differences to such a degree that some in their respective communities regarded the other as unfriendly rivals, they now recognize gratefully that they are moving toward a new era. In this new era their common ground is seen as the context in which to understand their differences, extend their hands in friendship and embrace each other as members of kindred communities of believers.[3]

Many African Christians and African Muslims live in the same community, where they meet together at home, work and service. Often, they share the same experience of living in a community where they are linked by community obligations and the intimate ties of family and friendship. Their sharing in community events involves them in each other's welfare, especially when they meet during stressful times like bereavements, disasters and emergencies such as epidemics, famines, droughts and floods. Less dramatic, but no less significant, is the meeting which takes place during celebrations such as weddings, naming ceremonies and reunions.

Natural meeting and sharing among ordinary people underlines the spirit of co-operation and mutual caring that goes far beyond any belief that each religion must look after its own interests. It is against this background that the religious leaders of the two communities should come together and meet in a spirit of co-operation. We Christians and Muslims in Africa are only too painfully aware of how far short we have fallen from God's will for us in our encounters with one another. Individuals and groups from both communities have often forgotten that power – financial, political, spiritual, social, cultural or intellectual – is a trust (amanah) from God, to be used responsibly and compassionately for the well-being of all, and not abused to advance the selfish interests of a particular individual, group or ideology.

People are naturally apprehensive about the possible misuse of power. Some Muslims, for example, complain in Nigeria that in certain places Christian groups have advanced and continue to advance their cause by insensitive use of financial resources from the West. On the other hand, there are Christians in other parts of the country who feel similarly anxious when political and financial power appears to belong predominantly to Muslims. Both Christians and Muslims ought readily to acknowledge that such accusations and apprehensiveness are not wholly justified

on either side. In those places where assurances are needed and have not yet been given, Christians and Muslims ought eagerly to affirm that neither community intends to misuse power to its own advantage.

The prerequisite of peace obliges Muslim and Christian communities to accept emotionally, as well as intellectually, the fact of their mutual existence in Africa, and to recognize each other as full and equal citizens of our national societies.

Responsibility for Living Together

The responsibility for living together requires Christians and Muslims to take due notice of those inbuilt elements in African religious traditions that hinder rather than help life in community, especially when that community assumes global proportions and becomes multi-religious in character. Ignorance about differing faiths and traditions gives rise to prejudice and mutual misrepresentations and caricatures. Even when accurate information is available from representatives of respective traditions there is often an unwillingness to accept the integrity of adherents of those traditions.

Another major obstacle in the way of living together is a conviction of the ultimate status and finality of one's own religious tradition interpreted so as to deny the authenticity of similar claims on the part of other religions. There are two extremes: a dogmatism which in the name of ultimate commitment is insensitive to other faiths; and a syncretism which in the name of universalism undermines religious identity itself. Both are hindrances to inter-religious community life. Proselytism can also be a source of great disharmony between religions. The proselytizing efforts of a religion can seem unfriendly to the religious community to which they are directed. Unethical proselytizing can be singularly unwholesome and create enduring discord between religions.

Obviously, Christian–Muslim relations do not exist in a vacuum. Political issues, as well as national structures and policies, impinge on relations between Muslims and Christians. It is a cliché to say that conflicts which divide along religious lines almost always have causes and underlying motivations which are not religious. Christians and Muslims living in the same region frequently state that normal, day-to-day relations between the two communities are harmonious. The problems arise from politics. This reflects the common perception in both groups that, left to themselves, the two communities have not found it difficult to live together, nor would there be tensions and conflicts today if intrusive forces, generally denoted by the term 'politics', did not interfere. This perception demands closer attention to see precisely what is meant by the intrusive factors that complicate and not infrequently damage Christian–Muslim relations.

The term 'politics' indicates something broader than governments, politicians, political parties and laws. In any analysis of conflict and tension, one quickly discovers that such demographic factors as majority or minority status, access to power and influence, ethnic and cultural differences, group identification, concepts of citizenship, international connections and economic stability, usually lie at the heart of the problems. In this century, confessional tension and strife in Africa have rarely been about theology or religious belief and practice, but have almost invariably arisen from the way that groups perceive the relative status and identity of the other.

Our primary responsibility towards the task of living together as a world community is to seek for all a higher and a more just way of life. This quest calls for an avoidance of those 'blocks' that have for one reason or other been part of our religious traditions in the past, and for a rebuilding of our communities consistent with the new dimension to our faiths, namely loyalty to the whole of humankind and not just to one component within it. Those elements in our traditions that promote life in community at large, emphasize the inherent dignity of people, their potential for sacrificing their individual interests for the welfare of all, and for dedicating themselves to the promotion of peace and economic and social justice. These must be brought to the fore and strengthened.

The task of exploring and reinterpreting our religious traditions to meet the growing demands of world community implies our willingness to look at ourselves with critical eyes and our readiness to confront in our tradition anything that may, intentionally or otherwise, contribute to the demeaning of others.[4]

A sense of interdependence and mutual need, and a willingness to work together as communities of faith, are the imperatives that must be adopted to face the challenge of one world. This means removing distrust and alienation and taking steps to work together. Under this conviction inter-communal life is both necessary and desirable.[5]

Muslims and Christians Working Together

Muslims and Christians have been in conversation ever since the dawn of Islam in Africa. Occasionally, their discussions took the form of systematic exchanges between limited numbers of persons with theological training and social or political standing.

Dialogue as a relation and interaction between people could become a means for promoting co-operation, mutual respect and tolerance for members of other communities. Dialogue offers to concerned people a method for working together to achieve practical goals. It can also be utilized in committees, conferences, informal get-togethers and interfaith discussions, focusing on bringing together our various resources for dealing with particular issues, and at the same time sensitizing people to new areas of human concern.

Dialogue can lead to a common desire for a search for truth and a reciprocal exchange of information and insights, thus deepening and strengthening people's knowledge of each other and of religious truth. This personal dimension needs to be stressed, lest dialogue be mistakenly seen as implying some kind of comparative religion wherein academic comparisons are made of creed and dogma for their own sake.[6]

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is necessary and it should be established at various levels. Its necessity arises from several factors:

1 The specific historical roots the two religions have in common.

2 The attitude of self-criticism which is inherent in each religion.

3 The increased mobility which has made meetings much more common, and has increased the responsibility of the two religions to find ways of living together in the same society.

4 The present situation, especially the common responsibility of both religions with regard to the political problems in Africa.

5 The encounter of the two religions is taking place in a world which finds itself in the midst of rapid change, when traditional religious conceptions are called into question.

Dialogue is just beginning. It must be expanded and deal with definite themes and questions, among which are the following:

1 How are Christianity and Islam presented today in textbooks and religious instruction? What is the context of theological education?

2 What problems arise out of the fact that Muslim and Christian populations are mixing in ever-increasing numbers? How can these problems be solved?

3 How are we to think about mission and proselytism?

4 What responsibility do Islam and Christianity have with regard to the human and social problems of our time?

Dialogue should be conducted with openness and frankness with a view to understanding each other's faith better, free from all bias, preconceived notions and prejudices. Such an attitude would lead to more positive and concrete results as to our mission.

Dialogue should not be confined to the academic level. If it is to be more meaningful it should take place at all levels of society. While maintaining our pledge to uphold the faith to which each one of us is committed, we are of the opinion that dialogue can and must create and foster an atmosphere of tolerance and friendliness, wherein we can pool our common resources to work

for the greater good of humanity. Dialogues of this nature will put an end to an era of 'anti-inter-religion' and usher in an era of inter-religious co-operation so necessary in the modern context of religion and society.[7]

The following steps could be taken to promote meaningful dialogue:

1 A common consideration of social and political issues, even joint action.

2 Religious Education syllabuses should provide opportunities for sensitive teaching about different faiths.

3 Theological colleges and seminaries should develop provision for the study of other faiths in the context of dialogue with adherents of those faiths.

4 Textbooks on Religious Education might be revised or written afresh, in order to ensure a proper presentation of the place of Islam and Christianity in the modern world and to avoid any caricature of one religion by the adherents of another.

5 Joint prayers can be offered for the welfare of the community as a whole.

6 Goodwill messages can be exchanged at religious feasts during the year, such as Ramadan, id al-Fitr, id al-Adha, Christmas, Easter and Harvest. For example, Christians could welcome a Muslim message at Ramadan which talks of the spirit of sacrifice and self-denial and urges the need for serving the interests of those with whom the community is shared. Similarly, Muslims might appreciate a Christian message at Easter which expresses how suffering and sacrifice can be instruments of healing and reconciliation in the community.

7 Information exchanged about important events in each part of the community can further increase mutual trust and widen areas of credibility.

8 Christian scholars and their Muslim counterparts can work together in such areas as

- research into practical possibilities for collaborative schemes;
- joint creation of centres for dialogue and informal meetings;
- exchange of information and joint action in situations of communal need.

Prospects for Mission in Christian–Muslim Contexts in Africa

The mission of the church is derived from God's own mission,[8] through which we are called by the power of the Holy Spirit for witness by word, deed and fellowship and to live the life of Christ. The church is a sign of the presence of God's reign within history. God uses this imperfect instrument to manifest the divine purposes of creation, justice and salvation, and to display God's unmerited grace and love among all people. Thus, the church participates in God's mission to bring justice and salvation to humanity and to reconcile a broken creation.

The primary goal for the church's participation in God's mission is expressed by Christ himself in the great commission: to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Mission directions were also given earlier to the disciples. They include preaching the good news of the kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons, and feeding the hungry. Proclamation of the gospel – calling people to believe in Jesus Christ, to become members of the new community in Christ, working for peace and justice, and struggling against all enslaving and dehumanizing powers – is therefore an integral part of the mission of the church.[9]

Islam and Christianity are missionary faiths. Among adherents of both there is a desire to share the riches of the faith and its heritage with others. But, notoriously, in the attempt to fulfil this missionary vocation, the missionary activities of Christians among Muslims and Muslims among Christians have sometimes led to grievances on both sides. Both groups have long memories of past pressures to conform or more recent experiences of aggressive and intensive proselytism.

The overall Muslim experience of the Christian mission was such that it failed to commend itself as something noble and holy. The Muslim critique can be summed up as follows:

1 Gross and flagrant misrepresentation of the teachings of Islam and of the life and message of the prophet Muhammad. Instead of examining Islam as it is, a totally unreal picture was concocted and used to denigrate Islam and Muslims.

2 The methodology of Christian mission concentrated upon influencing the object in a state of weakness and helplessness. Instead of direct invitation, approaches were made to those who were disadvantaged, exploiting their weaknesses for the sake of proselytism. The poor, the sick and the immature were made special targets of economic assistance, medicine and education. All this was a very unfair way to bring people to any religion.

3 Whatever the ultimate aim, subversion of the faith and culture of Islam seems to have been the prime target of the Christian missionary enterprise. The revival of Islam and the strengthening of Islamic moral life among Muslims were (and even now are) looked upon as anathema.

4 Muslims were treated as political rivals and as such subjected to overt and covert discrimination and repression. Their just causes fail to evoke any significant moral response from the Christian world.[10]

The absolute commitment of the Christian mission and of the Muslim to da'wah has undoubtedly been one of the principal contributory factors to the tension and conflict which have so extensively characterized the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Each feels itself to have been abused by the other, though not necessarily in the same way, and the pains of grievance continue to this day. Some Christians, myself included, may have felt that Muslim sensitivity to the breadth of new missionary thought and action within Christianity was dulled by their very justified anger with other practices which, though older, are by no means dead.

Nevertheless, I urge all Christian readers to take to heart, in humility and with utter seriousness, the grievances expressed by the Muslim brothers.

It is an unfortunate reality that Muslims in Africa know more about Christianity than Christians know about Islam. Many Christians in Africa would readily agree with G. J. O. Moshay and others like him who concluded that Allah in Islam is Satan.[11]

African Christians are not very enthusiastic about mission towards the Muslims for the following reasons.

1 Several decades ago – and even recently – most African countries were subjugated by the sword of Islam's might. Under some of the Muslim leaders, Christians suffered injustices and despotic treatment. This left behind alarming fears.[12]

2 Some converts from Islam to Christianity did not exhibit the fruits of true conversion, while others showed faith, moral courage and Christian zeal. However, the attitude of the former weakened the faith of some Christian workers. It caused heartbreak. Confidence of victory turned to despair and pessimism. One might excuse the backsliding converts by noting that perhaps they were not received into the Christian fold with love and sincerity.

3 The ignorance of most Christians concerning Muslim doctrine is another reason behind the weakness of Christian mission among the Muslims.[13]

This suggests to me that the church is in need of leaders who are aware of the essence of Islam, conversant with the intricacies of this religion, its literature and its history. I urge every worker in the Lord's field to give the Muslim question its fair share of study. The time has come to draw the attention of churches to support in every way the missionary societies working among Muslims in African countries. In so doing we realize that:

1 We must respond to God's eternal purpose, that Christ's kingdom has no boundaries.

2 Christians must remember Christ's clear orders to preach the gospel to every nation, knowing that the Muslim nation, obviously, is among them.

3 God calls us to finish this task because he loves the Muslim world, which calls God 'the compassionate, the merciful'. However, Muslims are unaware, nor do they wish to believe, that God's mercy cannot be shown apart from the redemption he ordained through the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world.

4 Most Muslim societies in Africa have prohibited preaching and some have expelled all missions from their countries. Nevertheless, modern technology has placed in our hands new ways of spreading the gospel, among them literature, radio, audio-cassettes and video. Christians can also witness in their daily lives to the highest and best in our respective churches.

Let us use these means, imploring with all prayer and supplication that God would remove every barrier that prevents the spread of the gospel of salvation.

Conclusion

Proselytism is of special importance for our religious communities in some situations. I am moved to call upon all religious bodies and individuals to refrain from proselytism, which we define as the compulsive, conscious, deliberate and tactical effort to draw people from one community of faith to another. Christianity has the responsibility to enhance the total development of the human personality and spirituality and to stand squarely behind all that promotes justice and peace. Christians are called upon to offer fresh motivation and fresh guidance for the growing expectations and changing aspirations of human beings in society.

Dialogue grows out of these common concerns and out of an increasing awareness that we need each other. It forms part of the realization that the way in which we recognize and adore God should be intimately connected with the ways in which we cherish each other. The God of mercy and the God of love whom we honour and uphold is the same God we seek when we honour and uphold our common humanity.

Notes

1 J. A. Ilori, 'Dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria'. Paper presented at the First International Conference on Christian–Muslim Dialogue held in Miango Rest Home, 1993.

2 Musa B. Gaiya (1997) 'Young Christians and Muslims facing the crisis of the end of the century', *Dialogue with ATR and Islam, Proceedings of Study Sessions of the Inter-Religious Dialogue Commission of the Association of Episcopal Conferences of West Africa*, pp. 47–62.

3 Emma Ekpunobi (1993), *Essays in Comparative Religion* (Akwa: Doxa Academic Publications), p. 52.

4 Iskander Jadeed (1967), *How to Share the Gospel with Our Muslim Brothers?* (Lagos: Light of Life Publications), pp. 5–20.

5 A. Flannery (1975), *Vatican Council II. The Concilliar and Post Concilliar Documents* (Washington, DC: Scholarly Resources), p. 59

6 Robert J. Priest (1987), 'Missionary Elenctics: Conscience and Culture', *Missiology: An International Review*, the Quarterly Journal of the American Society of Missiology.

7 Ibid., pp. 292 –3

8 Ibid.

9 Joseph Kenny, OP (1997), *Theological Themes Common to Islam and Christianity* (Lagos: Dominican Publications), pp. 2–15.

10 M. Bach (1997), *Major Religions of the World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), pp. 62–5.

11 G. J. O. Moshay (1990), *Who is this Allah?* (Ibadan: Fireliners International), p. 55.

12 Nickles (1976) *Religion in a Pluralistic Society* (New York: University Press), pp. 9–20.

13 A. Nwankwo (1979), *Nigeria: My Vision* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension), pp. 40–5.

Track Three: **New Approaches to Mission**

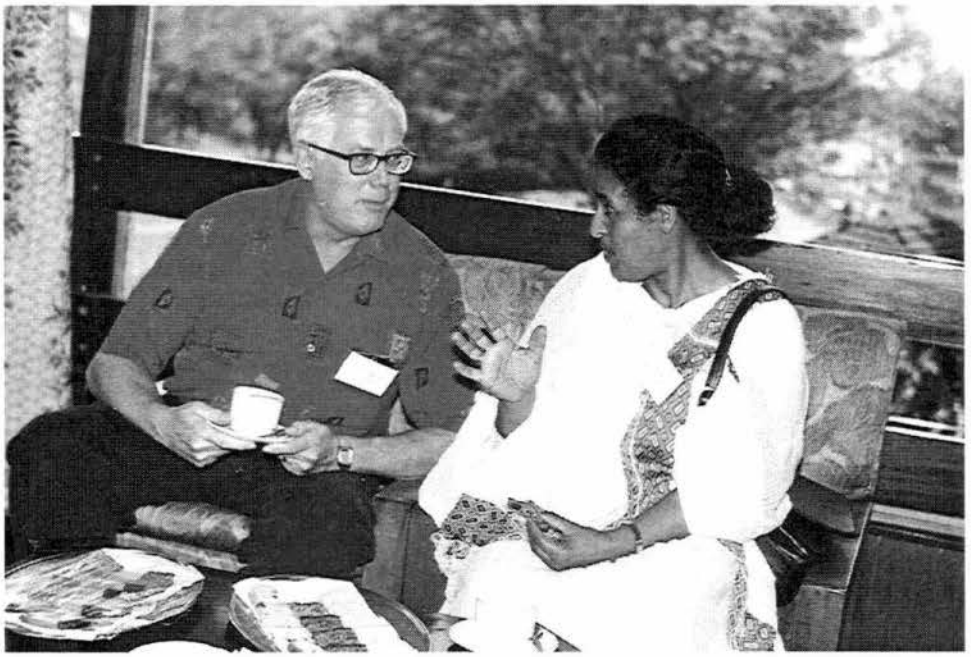
Track Three focused on sharing experiences of new and creative ways of witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ. Participants also reflected on the creative role of the Holy Spirit in the call to mission and thus discussion touched upon the role of renewal movements in the mission of the churches.

Case Studies

- **The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY)** - Ms. Aberash Dinsa (Ethiopia)
- **The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE)** - The Rev. Victoria Cortez Rodriguez (Nicaragua) - not available
- **The Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession** - Ms. Karin Roikova (Czech Republic)
- **The North Heights Lutheran Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** - Rev. Dr. Morris Vaagenes (USA)

Church Renewal and Mission

- **Renewal and Holy Spirit Movements: The Charismatic Challenge** - Dr. Gottfried Rothermundt (Germany)
- **Awakening Movements in Madagascar** - Rev. Dr. Rakoto Endor Modeste (Madagascar)



New Approaches to Mission: The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus

Aberash Dinsa

Introduction

From the outset I should like to note some specific limitations of this case study. First and foremost, let me confess that I am not a theologian who can provide a comprehensive analysis of the subject. Second, as my selections are made on a random basis, some important variables could have been overlooked. Third, this paper might not encompass all the relevant methods and approaches which could have helped us explore issues in more detail. Fourth, the work was undertaken amid constraints on time and resources.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) was established in 1959 with 20,000 members and eventually grew to 2.3 million members by 1998, making it one of the fastest growing Lutheran churches in Africa. EECMY has ten synods, two presbyteries, and two Area Works and five Joint Programmes. One of the synods, the Central Ethiopia Synod (CES), on which this case study is based, is in the capital of Addis Ababa and its vicinity. CES has eighteen congregations in and around Addis Ababa which have memberships ranging from 300–4,000. Most congregations have extended their main church buildings, or else use temporary shelters with microphones, or provide Sunday services in two shifts. Similar growth has taken place throughout the other synods.

It is important to note that EECMY grew very quickly despite such things as persecution, poverty, drought, a thirty-year civil war, and various political upheavals. Table 1 shows some of the significant developments in membership growth, 1991–7.

Table 1 EECMY growth 1991–7

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Established congregations	2,586	2,702	2,931	3,190	3,427	3,748	4,041
Preaching places	904	1,068	1,049	1,585	1,476	1,514	1,935
Membership	1,028,630	1,172,846	1,391,911	1,625,994	1,847,116	2,091,851	2,274,209
Communicant members	406,455	464,179	570,614	718,679	829,623	969,198	1,143,911
Pastors	338	339	432	460	477	497	528
Evangelists	545	582	603	772	987	876	1,240
Voluntary workers	30,647	31,704	44,960	63,511	65,369	85,564	104,347

Church growth occurs for various reasons. Biological growth is brought about when children of believers join the church through baptism. Transfer growth occurs when members transfer from one congregation to another when they change jobs, or for other reasons. And of course there is conversion growth, when new believers join the church. Tedela Asefa, a former student at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary (MYTS), argues that a church that depends only on biological growth is simply committing suicide. While transfer growth makes no difference in absolute numbers, growth through conversion brings great change within the body of Christ, for more people come to know Christ. EECMY growth is mainly through conversion.

EECMY synods, presbyteries and Area Works are autonomous, but labour together for one goal, which is to spread the gospel throughout the country and beyond (the church sends missionaries to Zambia, for example). The growth of EECMY is such that it takes place everywhere with slight variations. There is no synod which does not report an increase in membership at the annual executive committee meeting of the church.

Could your church grow as fast? How do you attract people (especially the young ones) to church? These are among the questions people usually ask when they visit Ethiopia. The answer is very clear: 'Let the Holy Spirit work in your life and your church'. A church which resists or does not fully allow the Holy Spirit to work will remain dormant or die, no matter how rich it may be or whatever efforts it makes to attract people. Converting people and helping the body of Christ to grow is purely the work of God (1 Corinthians 3:6–9).

I shall now describe some of the methods and approaches used by EECMY in its mission.

Holistic Approach

The Mekane Yesus Church, particularly since 1972, has strongly emphasized a holistic approach (serving the whole person, both spiritually and physically). The proclamation of the gospel and Christian service/diaconia and development are integral. Development efforts continue to enable the church to launch evangelistic work in most areas.

This should not be understood to mean that development work is used as a means to an end. Rather, development work is performed as part of a holistic approach, in which some development staff share their faith while they work. One of the development criteria adopted by the church in 1988 states that 'development centres should serve as venues for evangelism'.

The church has been able to reach out to many people through its literacy programme. EECMY introduced the country's first literacy programme. Originally, literacy work began as part of the missionary endeavour to enable people to read their Bible and sing from hymn books. In order to expedite the spread of the gospel, EECMY intensified its literacy programme, which later won it an international award. Literacy teachers also evangelized. Until recently, several congregations had their church buildings located in former literacy centres, which again implies that literacy work has been an integral part of outreach ministry.

Christian education was part of the curriculum of church schools until the Marxist regime prohibited it in the 1980s. Despite the prohibition, devotions and services continued in church schools and health institutions, leading to the conversion of many people.

Charismatic Movement

Charismatic renewal through the work of the Holy Spirit has long been a part of EECMY. As a result, an understanding of Christianity was developed and the gifts of the Holy Spirit experienced; for example, the gift of healing is widely exercised. Members are also encouraged to read scripture more in order to nurture their own spiritual lives.

A reflection paper entitled 'Visions and Challenges of the EECMY' states that giving more recognition to charismatic renewal and the exercising of spiritual gifts, especially among the younger generation, has been an important factor in the growth of the church. The word of God runs through the witness that the young generation gives to family, community and society.

Involvement of Lay Workers and Volunteers

Lay workers and volunteers include almost all members, but particularly those who are involved in church work full-time without salary. Table 1 shows the great number of voluntary workers compared to pastors and lay evangelists. They can be considered the missionary arms of

congregations. Lay ministers are mainly involved in witnessing and nurturing new souls until they enter the regular programmes of the church. New converts enter special teaching programmes, such as preparatory lessons for services in the congregations and confirmation classes that may last from six to nine months. In several congregations the laity also serve as catechists and preachers.

Home Cells

In most EECMY congregations in Addis Ababa, members are divided into Bible study groups according to their neighbourhood. These are called home cell groups. Each congregation can have more than ten groups, depending on the size of its membership. Home cell groups serve the spiritual development and social life of members. Cell groups are meant first of all to strengthen each member spiritually, via programmes at selected individual houses during week days. Bible study materials are produced by congregations for the cell groups. Prayer and fasting are included. Such gatherings were found very effective and easy to run, especially during the Marxist regime. They help develop good social relationships among the members themselves. Moreover, some unreached family members and others from the neighbourhood are reported to have been converted by means of such networks. Contributions are also made to support one another during sickness, funerals and other social commitments.

Political Developments

The demise of the Marxist government has also contributed to the growth of the church. Former party members and their followers discovered the failure of their godless philosophy. They began to look for religious faith and meaning in their lives, creating fertile ground for the gospel. Some even came to the church without anybody calling on them or witnessing to them. Quite a number of them believe and today most of them participate in the life and service of the church.

Outreach and Nurturing Programme

This programme comprises evangelistic efforts to reach out to people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Outreach programmes run by EECMY congregations have become the means by which souls have come to know Christ as their personal saviour. Conferences are also prepared by congregations from time to time to serve the same purpose. New converts will be under intensive follow-up with a discipleship programme to help them grow in Christian faith.

Priorities in outreach programmes are to employ major evangelistic efforts in the areas and peoples (tribes) where the church has not yet been, but where people show openness to the gospel. These include, for example, Arsi, Gumuz people, Hararge, Bale, Dawaro, Borana, Berata people, Geleb and Hamer Bako.

According to Revd James Gobena, assistant pastor of Entoto, one of the oldest congregations in Addis Ababa (with 4,000 members), 'Those believers who for the first time joined the church will be given a thorough lesson in what is meant by salvation'. Such preliminary programmes last for three months, after which converts progress to confirmation class, for another six months. While taking confirmation classes they are also assigned to group Bible studies. According to Gobena, there will also be another programme of three or four months on 'following Jesus' and 'discipleship', after which they will be allowed to take part in various group services conducted by members: choir, counselling, prayer groups, etc. Such series of follow-up programmes are meant to assist in the process of strengthening and deepening faith.

Students' Ministry

Over thirty years have elapsed since the church first engaged in student ministry among young people, especially in universities and colleges. The aim is of course to proclaim Christ to students, nurture members and help Christian students become living witnesses on campuses and where they live. Numerous students have accepted Christ as their personal saviour and gone on to become wonderful church leaders and church planters. They usually start with prayer meetings in their own houses; once a programme is established they hand it over to the nearest EECMY synod or congregation.

Urban Ministries

EECMY's Gospel Ministry Department and Urban Congregations have made great efforts to reach out to people, especially destitutes in Addis Ababa and other big towns. As a result, several bar- and street girls have received Christ as their personal saviour and joined the church.

Christian workers' fellowships have been organized in almost all governmental and non-governmental organizations by means of which Christian professionals are able to reach other professionals with the Good News. Such fellowships are interdenominational, and EECMY members have significant roles on various committees. They facilitate training programmes on urban outreach. Several civil servants have come to join the kingdom of God through such fellowship programmes.

Media Ministry

EECMY has great experience in the use of communications media for holistic ministry, including literature, audiovisuals and radio. The usefulness and impact of each of these media have been much greater than anticipated. Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG) was confiscated in 1977, but Yemisrach Dimts Communication Services (YDCS) is now broadcasting in the Amharic and Oromo languages. Programmes are prepared in Addis Ababa and broadcast through Trans World Radio (TWR). Radio has proved to be a very effective tool for outreach and nurture.

Challenges

Although it is growing fast, EECMY has its own limitations and challenges, as stated in 'Visions and Challenges of the EECMY'.

One of the basic challenges is the nurturing of old and new believers. The number of shepherds is very low compared to that of the sheep. According to the membership statistics of our church in 1995, 447 pastors and 772 evangelists served 1,847,116 members in 3,427 congregations and 1,476 preaching places. Of course, the service rendered by 65,369 volunteer leaders is highly appreciated and honoured. Hence, our Christian education efforts are directed toward:

- Training pastors, evangelists and other leaders to prioritize equipping lay leaders of different types for service and ministry.
- Strengthening catechism instruction and teaching in Sunday schools and congregations, in order to enhance congregational maturity and members' identity as evangelicals within a confessional church.
- Finding innovative ways to educate members and congregations in stewardship.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that a church is called to proclaim Christ Jesus to the world through word and deed, so that people may repent, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and serve him obediently. On the other hand, there is an apparent paradox in the fact that while the Great Commission is a primary task of the church, i.e. to bring the 'Good News' to humankind, regardless of race, colour and social status, some churches do not seem to give sufficient emphasis to evangelization or mission. Elaborating on this declining interest of the churches, John Stott said:

> The whole conception of mission is out of favour in today's world, and hostility to it is growing. Evangelism, missionary zeal, attempts to convert other people, are all rejected as 'incompatible with the spirit of tolerance', a gross infringement of individual liberties, and a most distasteful form of arrogance. Even in the Church some members are resistant to it. How can one religion claim a monopoly of truth? people ask. Are there not many different ways to God? What right have we to interfere in other people's privacy, or attempt to impose our view on them? Let's rather mind our business, and devoutly hope that other people will mind theirs.

Stott describes the mind-set of many church leaders and members. Let us ask ourselves some questions. Why are some churches in America, Europe and other parts of the world in a kind of coma, almost dying out? Why are some church buildings empty? Have the churches evangelized the whole world and thus completed their God-given task? Or does it mean that they have

completely forgotten all about going to their neighbours with the Good News, so as not to invade the privacy of others?

My point in raising these questions is not to blame churches in the West, but rather to challenge them all to pray that the revival which once motivated their pioneer missions abroad should happen again. At the same time, EECMY also needs to keep alert, lest it fall from what we claim to be our good position.

EECMY's approaches to mission may not be unique; many other churches are presumably using similar methods. However, a forum such as this provides an opportunity for improving our methods and increasing their impact.

New Approaches to Mission: The Silesian Church

Karin Roikova

I come from the Czech Republic in the heart of Europe. For more than forty years this small country was governed by a communist regime which tried to stamp out religion. The communists learned to be subtle: they gave the church just enough freedom to survive but not enough to allow it to flourish. The church was tolerated only to the extent that it was necessary for political 'window dressing'.

The government granted permission for pastors of major denominations to teach religious instruction but only in the context of atheistic schools, and then only upon written request from a child's parents. Parents who made such a request, however, were soon subjected to an official reprimand and later experienced job discrimination. A child's education and its future became uncertain; such children were publicly ridiculed for their old-fashioned beliefs. Faithful pastors were removed from big cities to small villages to minimize their influence, while those church leaders who discredited themselves through alcohol abuse, immorality or financial dishonesty were most likely to be promoted and posted to cities.

However, the communists had to contend with a big problem: a perfectly capable underground church. Like people in the New Testament we banded together in house prayer and Bible study groups. This enabled us to go further in our Christian lives than if we had tried to go it alone. Without such meetings and other activities it is impossible to know where I and other Christians would be today. Christians are like burning coals: together they glow, apart they grow cold. That is why the communists sought to isolate individual churches from each other and from the outside world, to sow discord between denominations and church members, and to separate Christians from their own spiritual leaders. They forbade pastoral visitation and counselling. They knew that Christians grow stronger from their sense of community with other Christians.

But praise be to God! He heard the prayers of our faithful grandparents and intercessors for Eastern Europe and our nation. There is no longer strict control of registered churches. For Christians there are now new opportunities, new visions, new goals, a new excitement and new approaches to mission. I am very thankful that we are now able to share the gospel publicly.

Of course, all this is not as easy as we thought. Immediately after the revolution in November 1989 all church denominations began with great enthusiasm to organize evangelistic crusades at huge stadiums and theatres. Those denominations were still working independently. Such massive mission crusades cost a lot of money and time, with minimal results. I believe they failed because the method of evangelizing was too conventional. We cannot win people to Christ by the mechanical application of methods and strategems.

After one such evangelization campaign I was given the name of a young woman said to have committed her life to Christ. She was unable to tell me what had happened to her at the stadium that day. She did not want to hear about God any more. Such people come and go. We also discovered that participants at such crusades were mostly Christians. Non-Christians still have bad opinions about the church as a result of the communists spreading false rumours about Christians: the church is still regarded as for the old, the weak, the mentally handicapped and people who are dying.

What are we supposed to do? Retreat to our churches, complain about the old communist dictatorship and hope that people come to us? No. I firmly believe that the whole church is under an obligation to obey the Lord's commission to take the gospel to all nations. The disciples first witnessed in Jerusalem, right where they were. The Lord wants to do great things in the Czech Republic. The Holy Spirit has been preparing a way through the wasteland of people's hearts. Can we perceive it? Do we understand that the fruit is ripe, that there are souls for Jesus to be won?

Jesus began his ministry with individuals, with the first disciples. It is easier for us to shout the gospel at people from a distance than it is to involve ourselves deeply in their lives, their problems, and to feel their pain. The Lord Jesus gained sinners by going to them and becoming their friend. He did not seclude himself and complain that nobody cared about him. Jesus sends us into the world to identify with others. It is not easy. I think we all know the three big obstacles we need to overcome: fear, bashfulness and laziness. These obstacles can be overcome through prayer and determination.

How to Evangelize

1 *Be creative*. Remember that sharing our faith is not a mechanical matter. The church is a body with many gifts.
2 *Be sensitive*. Let the Holy Spirit show you how and when to speak about God and your faith.
3 *Be direct*. When we have a good opportunity to share our faith lead the conversation from ethics and morals direct to God.
4 *Be lenient*. Never argue because of faith. The good news is a testimony of love.
5 *Be consistent*. Very few people come to faith in Jesus without thinking about it. Continue to share God's love with them in the meantime.
6 *Be loving*. The word urges us to love and to share that love without any conditions.
7 *Be personal*. Personal testimony from the heart has a power that can touch many.
8 *Be specific*. Remember that the goal of sharing is to lead our friends to an understanding of what Jesus Christ has done for them.

There are many churches in the Czech Republic – especially in Bohemia – which are dying. What can be done to change this situation and make them grow? There are at least six obstacles to church growth:

1 *No prayers and interest for unreached people.* Who does the church pray for? What kind of prayers do we hear in our churches? With what do we start and end our prayers? Often it is 'We, for us, about us, bless us, give us ...', etc.

2 *Sin in our hearts (Isaiah 59:1, 2).* The people wondered why God did not answer them. Sin had separated them from God. The problem was not with God, but with them.

3 *Idols in the heart (Ezekiel 14:1–3).* The elders of Israel had come to Ezekiel and asked him to pray for them, but God spoke to Ezekiel and told him not to do so because they had idols in their hearts. An idol is anything we put between us and God. God cannot send new Christians to a church where people do not give God first place.

4 *An unforgiving spirit (Mark 11:25).* We must forgive others before God will forgive us. Lack of forgiveness leads to bitterness (Hebrews 12:15). Forgiveness is the foundation for a relationship. Each of us makes mistakes, so every relationship needs forgiveness. Forgiveness is not easy, neither is it a feeling: it is our decision. When we pray to Jesus and we confess our iniquities we do not say 'excuse me' or 'I am sorry'. We must forgive what we cannot forgive, because there starts forgiveness. Sometimes we need to make the same decision every day, every time we see the person who has hurt us. Without forgiveness our nation is lost. We should love our neighbour as ourselves, including our enemies. Some think that if we love somebody, then we have completed our responsibility. But if we truly love our neighbour we will not stop with evangelism. If we cannot forgive we cannot witness.

5 *Stinginess in our giving (Proverbs 21:13).* Those who are small and mean cannot be mighty in their prayer.

6 *Wrong treatment (1 Peter 3:7).* This does not just mean between husband and wife, but also among church members. It does not matter how successful we are: God's eyes are on our home life and our church life. How can God send new Christians into a church where there is wrong treatment? In the New Testament we read about the poor, widows and orphans in the very first church. Social action almost becomes the 'sacrament' of evangelism, for it makes the message significantly visible. Jesus did not simply announce the good news of the kingdom, he performed visible signs of the kingdom. Social action is a partner to evangelism (James 1:27).

We need to reach people with the gospel just as Jesus did, but on the other hand many people came to him themselves. They were the sick, the hopeless and the needy. Today there are many who yearn for help. This is a great opportunity for us.

For the last hundred years the Evangelical Church has placed great emphasis on its ministry among the lowliest social groups. Evangelical social institutions called 'homes of mercy' were founded by the initiative of Senior Karel Kulisz, a pastor during the Austrian monarchy. These institutions were later extended and after the Second World War until 1959 they belonged to the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. In that period 'homes of mercy' served also as a significant centre of the evangelistic and missionary work for the local church and neighbourhood. After the communist takeover in 1948, especially during the period of collectivization, a diaconic ministry was possible only on a very unofficial basis. Despite many problems Lutherans visited state institutions for elderly people, hospitals and orphanages. When it was possible many families took children from state orphanages for weekends or holidays. (In most cases the authorities sooner or later discovered that these were Christian families and any contacts had to be discontinued.) Immediately after the revolution in 1990 a Christian organization for social work was founded by the Silesian Evangelical Church.

The Czech parliament has passed a restitution law to return property confiscated during the communist regime. So far four houses have been returned to the church. Since they were in a very poor condition a lot of work and money were needed for reconstruction. Building materials are very expensive: prices are comparable to those within the European Union, but the average wage is much lower. During the communist regime 80 per cent of support for reconstruction came from western countries; now it is about 20 per cent. The Czech state has indicated its duty to grant financial support for church property, but there is usually no money available. We therefore have to depend on ourselves. Thanks be to God our people are generous despite their low earnings. Younger people are learning to give to the church; more and more are prompted to support church ministry.

One church house has been made a rest home for the retired. Sisters and brothers who work there try to create a homely atmosphere where love, kindness, understanding and trust prevail. They also provide basic health care and nursing, spiritual and pastoral care, prayer and weekly Bible studies. Guests may also attend Sunday services in the local church. In the house there is a library with plenty of books and tapes.

Workers at the Agape Centre – for people in difficult personal situations – are ready and willing to provide counselling and basic food and clothing. Part of the centre is given over to a bookstore with Christian literature and music.

Betezda House is a much larger building run as a centre for youth with learning difficulties, aged 18–35. Between 1991 and 1994 the building underwent major reconstruction. Workers at the centre try to familiarize residents with the fundamentals of Christian ethics, with the ultimate aim of achieving their independence by acquiring new skills and thus integrating them into wider social life. There is daily prayer and singing.

Bethel House is a place where homeless people can meet God. Most of our employees are committed Christians. They also co-operate closely with the Job Office. The daily programme provides opportunities for small work activities in and around the house. We believe in the power and the influence of the Holy Spirit on homeless people's lives and we try to introduce them to a new life-style and values. If they wish, they can participate in daily prayer, Bible study, an education programme, various training courses, seminars and discussions.

Before the revolution in 1989 it was forbidden to establish new churches. After 1989 our first new congregation was established in the city of Frydek-Mistek (population 60,000). There was no money to build a new church, so instead we bought a house and converted it into a parish house with a fellowship hall and an apartment for a local pastor. In the future we hope to have another five or six new congregations, especially in cities.

Children and youth are the future of our church. Our small country has only 10 million people. About 2 million are children. Only 1 per cent of these children have an opportunity to hear the gospel regularly, yet we have the freedom to proclaim the gospel to these needy children. In six years we have reached more than 2,000 children and through them some parents. Some 90 per cent of my children at classes come from non-Christian families. Every summer we organize regular camps. We co-operate with the City Council, which gives us some children from difficult families on low incomes and those children hear about Jesus for the first time in their lives.

In 1994 some parents had the idea to establish a Christian school. After a few problems with the Department of Education we were given permission to open the first Christian class in a state school in our city. Now we have five classes. In each class there are about twenty pupils. All are welcome regardless of confession, but parents have to agree that the children should be educated by Christian standards. The school is free and children study the same subjects as in state classes, plus two hours of religion with obligatory learning of Bible verses, singing Christian songs and Bible reading. Every day is opened and closed with prayer. In every classroom the front wall displays a cross and relevant decorations during Christian holidays. Children also participate in outreaches and visits to orphanages, churches and diaconia centres. No parents have ever withdrawn their child from the Christian school and put them in state school. On the contrary, parents apply to have their children educated in Christian school. They have realized that the standard of education and morality is much higher than in public schools.

After 1989 church youth decided with great excitement to buy a large tent for 650 persons and organize a large Christian youth camp. The camp now takes place every year in July and lasts for one week. It is located in a beautiful village. More than 500 young people regularly visit the camp, which provides an opportunity for everyone to gather and encourage one another in the faith. It also helps participants to become familiar with the Bible as the word of God. The organizational team for the camp consists mainly of young volunteers. The main part of the camp programme consists of Bible lectures and evangelistic meetings. This is the time in which we

want to lead young people to a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ. Camp workshops provide answers to various practical problems. Work in small groups helps to reveal some personal problems and strengthens relationships. In their free time youth can take part in different sports or cultural activities. This way they can see that Christianity is not just a matter of sitting in church and singing old hymns.

I belong to the largest congregation of the Silesian Lutheran Church and I am so glad that all three pastors are very mission-oriented and support all our lay people in their ministry. I have noticed that in other countries such ministry, especially preaching and teaching of lay people, is not so developed as in our church. Every Sunday afternoon we have a cross-generational Bible study with about a hundred people. These meetings are similar to Sunday morning services but without the liturgy: we sing contemporary music, and usually three lay people teach the word of God, one of whom is a guest from a neighbouring congregation. We invite lay people to our youth meetings to share their experiences and lead us in discussion.

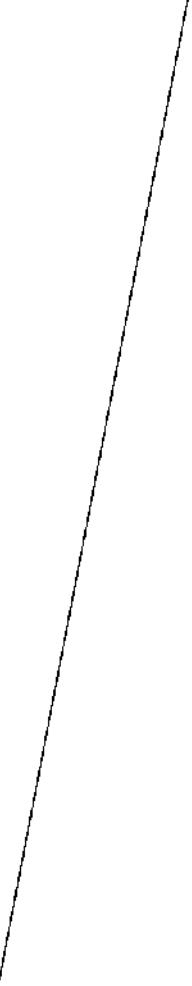
Our Lord showed his mercy to us in the past. The Bible was translated into Old Czech immediately after the French and German versions in the fourteenth century. However, people did not treasure it, but rather persecuted God's people and embraced godless doctrines. For this reason, we were punished with a communist regime and are now being punished again by forces openly hostile to morals and in direct rebellion against God. These forces are deeply rooted in this country. It is disturbing to see how Europe is becoming a haven for different cults. Professor Rodney Stark has written that in 18 European countries there are 1,317 different cults; in the USA the number is around 425. The real number is of course much higher, because many operate in secret. Middle-class people and well-educated individuals seek to fill the emptiness in their spiritual lives. Many religious movements and sects compete with the church. Horoscopes are published daily. There are no adequate laws to cope with pornography and drugs. TV is full of violence and foul language. But in spite of all this, new Christians are raised in front of our eyes.

> Let men call on God earnestly that each may
> turn from his wicked way and from the violence
> which is in his land. (Jonah 3:8)
>
> But thanks be to God
> who always leads us in His triumph in Christ,
> and manifests
> through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge
> of Him in every place. (2 Corinthians 2:14)

To close, let me share a short story. There once were four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry

about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody would not do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have. What can you do? Everybody can pray for unreached people in the world. Everybody can help with the costs involved in getting the gospel to the unreached. Everybody can do something for Christ today. God does so much with so little. We add and God multiplies. May God continue to expand you from within to others without.

> So, my dear brothers, since future victory is sure,
> be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord's work,
> for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted
> as it would be if there were no resurrection.



New Approaches to Mission: A Case Study from the USA

Morris Vaagenes

The story is told of a picturesque white-frame church situated in the countryside on a high point visible from a long distance. One evening just after dusk this landmark church caught fire. The blazing building attracted a crowd. There was a local farmer who considered himself a sceptic. He often boasted about never darkening the doors of a church. On seeing the church ablaze he hurried to the scene of the fire. A neighbour, a member of the burning church, approached him and said facetiously, 'It's strange seeing you here. What brings you to church?' 'This is the first time I have seen this church on fire', he replied with a wry smile.

There is a telling truth in the sceptic's witty quip. One reason more people are not attracted to the church may be that they see too little fire and fervency in it. As a Catholic priest lamented, 'The church is geared for the lukewarm'. It is my conviction that a church that is hot, and not cold or lukewarm, will have strong drawing powers, will grow and will lead its constituents into intentional mission.

A vision for spiritually live churches has motivated me during my 44 years in ordained ministry – the church on fire for Christ and for his mission on earth. This dream for a spiritually renewed church was birthed in me from early childhood. My parents' daily prayer for spiritual awakening in the church influenced the direction of my ministry significantly. The Malagasy Lutheran Church, in which they served as lifetime missionaries, has modelled revival for me. My lifelong quest has been for God's mighty, glorious presence to be manifest among people, for Christ's incarnate life and love to be expressed through the church to the world, and for the Holy Spirit's power and gifts to be operating in the church for the healing of hurting humans.

Little did I dream that renewal would happen in a church where I pastored, for it seemed to me that spiritual awakenings took place either long ago or far away. And so I stand in amazement at what God has done in North Heights Lutheran Church. A theme verse which has guided me during my 38-year ministry at North Heights is Psalm 127:1: 'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain'.

North Heights is a Mega Church

North Heights is a large congregation, known as a mega church, located on two beautiful campuses in northern suburbs of St Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. It is a member church of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and is a major centre for charismatic renewal in the Lutheran church nationally and globally. The congregation conducts ministry on two sites, yet is one body with one staff, one programme, one government and one treasury. North Heights pioneered among Lutherans the concept of one congregation with two locations. Currently, several large churches are following this pattern with success.

Eight pastors and a full-time equivalent paid staff of 120 serve the 8,500 parishioners and equip them for their work of ministry. The eight weekend worship services and four Sunday school sessions, together with a large smorgasbord of other programmes, are geared for evangelism into the community, for nurturing the members in their faith and for enlisting, training and deploying them for mission. All activities are geared to offer healing, wholeness and maturity to the participants.

North Heights offers a very wide variety of ministries for all ages at our two locations. More than 2,400 persons are engaged in a volunteer leadership, teaching or serving capacity in the church's ministries. Some 5,000 people attend services, classes and activities on Sundays, and more than 3,000 participate in other programmes during the week. But in reality the main ministries of North Heights take place where members live, work, study or play, for all members are chosen by the Lord to be ministers and are called into a lifestyle of ministry and service to the Lord and to the world. The 8,500 ministers of North Heights come into daily contact with hundreds of thousands in our metropolitan area and wherever they go. We trust that their ministries are Spirit-inspired and effective. The congregation is directly engaged in multiple ministries of service to the community through its own programme activities and in partnership with other churches and organizations in our region and around the world.

Mega churches have emerged in metropolitan areas around the world during the past generation, and they are here to stay. They are strong evangelistic, renewal and teaching centres attracting thousands to Christ and the church. They are full-service churches, in essence shopping malls, offering a wide variety of ministries and programmes. They are led by entrepreneurial, visionary pastors. Most mega churches are charismatic, pentecostal or evangelical, and they have a vision for reaching the lost. North Heights is one of a dozen mega churches in the Twin Cities area.

Where there is Vision, the People Flourish

Vision is a prerequisite for mission – a vision for the harvest and a concern for those in need.

North Heights is a visionary church and a compassionate community, with a vision and empathy for those in painful situations and despairing conditions. We see tremendous needs and hurts all around us. But how can we possibly meet all these desperate needs? We can't. And God does not intend us to. Therefore we seek the Holy Spirit's guidance as to what God wants us to do.

Our approach to ministry is to find out where the Holy Spirit wants us to serve and how and by whom. The Holy Spirit must do it, and we are at the Holy Spirit's service to do what we are guided to do. The Holy Spirit must then provide the wisdom and strength for the task. This leaves us free from condemnation regarding the many areas of need where we are not called to serve.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit will lay a burden for a particular ministry on someone's heart. That person will share this vision with staff and lay leadership. Together we seek confirmation from the Holy Spirit. If we sense the inner witness of the Spirit that this is the calling for us and if all else checks out, then we ask direction as to the chosen channel to give leadership to this calling. Usually it is the one who felt the initial burden. The vision will be shared with others or even announced to the congregation, inviting those who feel a concern to come together to pray, seek direction and plan. The needed finances are then prayed in under the principle: what the Lord orders, the Lord will pay for. What God prescribes, God must provide.

New Approaches to Mission

'New approaches to mission' may be expressed better as '*renewed* approaches to mission', for as the writer of Ecclesiastes says, there is nothing new under the sun. Three approaches to mission which have propelled North Heights into new mission endeavours are

- motivation to mission;
- mobilization for mission;
- multiplication of mission.

Motivation to mission

The Great Commission is our mandate to mission and the anointing with the Holy Spirit empowers for mission. The Holy Spirit provides the motivating ability to fulfil our calling to mission. The Great Commission directs North Heights Church in its mission. Matthew's version, following the Greek text, reads: 'And Jesus said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given me. Going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I command you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."'[1]

Note that the Greek text does not read 'Go', but 'Going'. The command is not to go but to disciple. Jesus's expectation was that after his ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the disciples would be going out into all the world with the good news of Jesus's salvation and lordship. Another way of stating Jesus's command is this: As you are going disciple all nations. 'Disciple' is a verb, not a noun; it is a verb in the imperative mood, i.e. a command. The action is not to make disciples but to disciple. The means for fulfilling the Great Commission is to disciple through baptism as initiation into the faith and through teaching obedience to Christ's commands as a principle of life in the kingdom.

In Mark's rendition of the Great Commission the command is to preach the gospel to the whole creation with the object of leading the hearers to faith and baptism. Then Jesus promises: 'And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; ... they will lay their hands on the sick; and they will recover.'[2] This was the pattern for the apostolic church, as we note: 'And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it. Amen.[3] If the command to preach the gospel and to baptize was intended for the whole church age, including the present, so the promises of the charismatic dimension would hold true for now also. At North Heights Church we believe and practise the command and the promises.

The Great Commission as recorded by Luke and John is dependent for fulfillment on the Holy Spirit's empowerment. Jesus instructed the apostles to wait for this clothing with power from on high before entering into their ministry, for he would baptize them with the Holy Spirit shortly. With the coming of the Holy Spirit they would receive the divine power to witness, Jesus declared, and their witness would reach out to the ends of the earth.[4] If the Holy Spirit's power was necessary for the apostles, it certainly is imperative for believers today as well. At North Heights we share this truth and pray with many to receive the Spirit's anointing.

The anointing with the Holy Spirit empowers for witness and mission. 'The Great Commission derives its meaning and power wholly and exclusively from the Pentecost event', says Harry R. Boer.[5] He added, 'Two things stand out with great clarity in Acts: the irresistible missionary expansion of the Church, and the power of the Spirit in that expansion.'[6] Again he states the significance of the Holy Spirit in the missionary witness of the church: 'Acts is governed by one dominant, overriding and all-controlling motif. This motif is the expansion of the faith through missionary witness in the power of the Spirit.'[7] Witnessing/mission/service is to be the task and lifestyle of every believer. Power for ministry comes from the Holy Spirit.

The church universally acknowledges Spirit-anointing in principle, but in practice too often fails to lead people to receive, or appropriate, the Holy Spirit in power and to rely on the Holy Spirit for all things. The Roman Catholic Church has made confirmation the sacrament for receiving the Holy Spirit and this through the laying on of the bishop's hands, but it appears to be little understood and only formally practised.

Protestant churches de-sacramentalized confirmation and instead made it a time for instruction, indoctrination, catechization, confession of faith, personal trust in Jesus for salvation, affirmation of baptismal covenant, or confirmation by God of the baptized person's salvation. Yet Lutheran confirmation rites contain prayers with the laying on of hands to confer or renew the gift of the Holy Spirit on the confirmand.

The Order for Baptism in the Lutheran Book of Worship prescribes that immediately following baptism the minister lays both hands on the head of the baptized person and prays for the Holy Spirit:

> God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks for freeing your sons and daughters from the power of sin and for raising them up to a new life through this holy sacrament. Pour your Holy Spirit upon N.N.: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence.[8]

Water baptism unites the baptized person with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Spirit baptism empowers with the Holy Spirit's anointing. These are two sides of the same baptism coin; that is, two works of God in the initiation into the Christian faith.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers. This means every believer is his or her own priest with direct access to God through faith in Jesus Christ. In a secondary sense every believer is called to be a priest, an intermediary in bringing Jesus to others and in pointing out to them the way of salvation. God has given believers the ministry of reconciliation ... entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making an appeal through us.[9] As priests we need the Spirit's call to come to God and the Spirit's power for ministry. Paul expressed it this way: 'But it is God who ... has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.'[10]

At North Heights we believe that in baptism we are incorporated into Christ and Christ into us. We seek to lead baptized persons into an awakening to and an assurance of their salvation in Christ. And we seek to lead each one into the Spirit-filled life of walking in relationship with him. How and when a person may awaken to a personal and conscious relationship with Jesus as Saviour and Lord, or when they may welcome into their life the person, gifts and work of the Holy Spirit, will vary. But we believe it is imperative for every believer to know the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a personal and intimate way. Terminology and theology concerning the reception of the Spirit may differ, but it is of utmost importance that believers be filled with the Holy Spirit.[11]

Mobilization for mission

All members are called, trained and empowered to be ministers. We stress the necessity of dependence on the Holy Spirit for fulfilling the Great Commission, and we emphasize discipling as a means of nurturing converts. In 1962 I shifted to an intentional discipleship style of ministry. We began small-group home-fellowship meetings. In this relational setting of worship, teaching, sharing and prayer for personal needs we saw people develop in their faith. In 1965 I enlisted and trained twelve highly motivated members in an intensive two-year Bible overview class. They gained a solid knowledge of scripture and of foundational principles for Christian living and service. I employed the Bethel Series Teacher Training programme as core curriculum and added elements I considered essential in faith formation.

I trained several successive small groups using this discipleship approach. Then I enlarged the training programme so as to lead the whole congregation through the Bible in three years. After that we developed a School of the Bible as a training centre to serve our members and the larger charismatic renewal movement. The small-group ministry has been highly effective for faith development and ministry equipping.

These discipling approaches have produced tremendous results. Many emerged as leaders in the congregation, a biblically literate and articulate leadership that was grace and faith oriented. Thousands have become students of scripture and are applying these truths to their lives and sharing them with others. Many have discovered their ministry gifts and callings. Scores have entered into pastoral ministry and missionary service. Large numbers receive ministry training and get involved in service in the church and community. They share their faith with new confidence and conviction and with spontaneity and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading. The spiritual maturity of the congregation has been raised significantly and their loyalty strengthened greatly. The impact is felt in all age groups, from cradle to grave.

What is the fruit of the discipleship approach we have employed over the past 37 years? It is a church on fire for the Lord. It is thousands of transformed lives. It is a revitalized congregation impacting the whole region. We perceive this as a pattern for ministry modelled in the New Testament church and applicable in the contemporary setting.

The task of persons in called and ordained offices of ministry is both to do ministry and to equip believers for their work of ministry:

> And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.[12]

This is an underlying philosophy of the congregation. A primary task of those on the church's ministry staff is to serve the flock and to equip believers to do the work of ministry. This biblical truth is emphasized in many churches, but the key to making it work is full reliance on the Holy Spirit.

The age where professional pastors, teachers, ministers and missionaries do the main work of ministry has past. The age of witness is here. In the former method, church members pay professional staff to do the main work of witness and ministry. The people look to the paid professionals to serve them and to minister in their stead. There are several major problems with this approach:

1 It is unbiblical and inconsistent with New Testament practices.

2 It is an impossible task, for the needs of the world and the work to be accomplished are far too great for a limited number of ordained clergy and paid staff to meet.

3 It is far too costly to support.

4 There are far too few willing to serve in church and mission vocations, thereby making it virtually impossible to fulfill the Great Commission.

5 It leads to frustration, burn-out and condemnation among the zealous.

6 It lays blame, shame, duty and law on Christians because of the vast harvest fields left unattended and perishing. While this is not the desired motivation and method for fulfilling the Great Commission, we must acknowledge that great strides have been accomplished and great sacrifices made in the Lord's service under this professional ministry approach, and for this we thank God.

Witness to Jesus Christ and his kingdom must be brought to every person before Jesus's return and the close of the age. 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a witness to all nations; and then the end will come.'[13]

I believe we are in that sovereign moment of holy history in which the Holy Spirit is being poured out in an unprecedented manner across the whole Christian church. The purpose is to empower believers to witness across the face of the globe to Christ's present reign on earth and his coming kingdom in heaven. This is the age of witness to the whole world.

At North Heights we believe that the professional ministry staff is called to minister. And its task is two-fold: (1) to preach and teach God's word, administer the sacraments, set people free from bondage, care for the souls of parishioners, and (2) to enlist, train, equip and release members into their God-given ministries. The first task of direct evangelistic, pastoral and teaching ministry is part of the ministry training process for the priesthood of all believers, i.e. training

by example. As those in the church's ministry offices train and deploy believers into ministry, they are engaged in the multiplication of ministers, not simply addition.

We have experienced multiplication growth in our congregation during the past four decades in which membership has grown 2,400 per cent. Many in the community heard about the spiritual awakening in our church and came to see. After hearing the good news of salvation in Christ many of them placed their trust in him. Then they shared their faith and experiences with family and friends and invited them to receive Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. Many more responded in faith. These in turn told friends and more believed. Many new converts made North Heights their church home and attended growth classes, and thus matured in their faith. Others received teaching and training in our church and sought to foster new life in their congregations. North Heights has grown rapidly in attendance, membership, spirituality, influence and witness.

Multiplication of mission

As a result of the Spirit's anointing on our members, their training for ministry and their release into mission, many new ministries have sprung up in our church and community, and thousands of our parishioners are serving in dynamic, vital programmes. I will describe a few of the ministries at North Heights Lutheran Church.

Special education

Our special education programmes for mentally handicapped children and young people began because of two families in our congregation who had special-needs children. I gave them special confirmation instruction. But I felt the need to provide additional religious instruction for these children. It was at about the same time that Dr John Rynders, a professor at the University of Minnesota, renowned in this field, joined our church together with his family. I asked him if he would be interested in beginning a special education class in our Sunday school. He was excited about this challenge because it was rare to find a church engaged in such a programme. He enlisted some members who worked at a local state institution for mentally retarded children. Together they started a special needs class. It began with one child. That was in 1973. Today, over 120 children and young people attend these classes at our two campuses. Also 25 years ago we began a week-night social programme called I Am His Club. Its strong spiritual component is a reason many mentally challenged adults enjoy attending.

It is rewarding to observe transformation taking place in these special lives as they encounter the love of Jesus, as they sing worship songs to the Lord, as they hear from God's word how much God loves them, as they are prayed for individually and as they experience warm love from the staff of these programmes.

Counselling clinic

In 1974 Dr William Backus, a clinical psychologist, noted author and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) pastor, presented to me the concept of a counselling clinic in which trained and supervised lay counsellors do Christian counselling using a combined professional counselling model and biblical truth as the basis for therapy. After prayer for guidance, consultation with church leadership and council approval the congregation called Dr Backus to our pastoral staff as Director of the Counselling Clinic. During the next year he trained two dozen persons in an intensive professional counselling programme utilizing cognitive therapy within what he calls truth therapy, based on Jesus's words: 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'.[14] Dr Backus has developed this counselling approach in a series of books, among them *Telling Yourself the Truth*, his bestseller which describes and applies the principles of truth therapy, and *Telling the Truth to Troubled People*, which is the teaching manual he used for training lay counsellors.[15]

Since the founding of the counselling clinic, Dr Backus and his successor, Steven Wiese, a clinical psychologist and ELCA pastor on the North Heights staff, have trained dozens of volunteers who have served as lay counsellors. Currently 27 volunteer lay counsellors provide free counselling services to over 2,000 persons annually. This ministry is available to members and non-members alike. It is intended for persons who need more extended counselling. Professional psychological tests, such as the MMPI, are utilized as instruments for clinical diagnosis. Since its inception the counselling clinic has provided confidential professional Christian therapy to thousands, most of them non-members.

Personal prayer and deliverance ministry

In the early 1970s as word got out that North Heights was a charismatic church, people started coming to seek help for their needs, healing from their sicknesses and deliverance from their bondage. During the 1960s most of this prayer ministry took place in home fellowships. Sunday evening prayer and praise services were started in 1970 in which charismatic gifts were operative. Personal prayer ministry took place at the close of service. By the mid 1970s we began praying for people at the altar rail during Sunday morning worship services, a practice which we are still continuing. Dozens come forward each Sunday for prayer. I am amazed at the deep needs of members and visitors. The most frequent requests are for healing of bodily illness, restoration of marriages, salvation of loved ones and knowledge of God's will. Many just recently diagnosed with cancer come to the altar accompanied by loved ones, often in great distress. We anoint them with oil, lay on hands and pray God's promises into the person's heart and situation.

In 1972 I was asked by a pastor to cast demons out of his wife. She was possibly the most severe case of demonizing I have encountered. She was delivered of all demons. After this I was

overwhelmed with persons in need of exorcism. In response to the many needs for deliverance and healing our congregation called Erwin Prange, a veteran in healing and deliverance ministry and LCMS pastor, to develop these prayer ministries. People came from all over our region for prayer, an indication that this ministry was meeting a great need. For instance, during one week people came from ten different states to receive prayer and deliverance ministry from Pastor Prange.

At present Robert Burmeister, an ELCA pastor on our staff for 22 years, directs our healing and deliverance prayer ministry. He is training teams to assist him. Our vision is to develop a major healing and deliverance centre at North Heights to help many more suffering persons. Currently healing and deliverance prayers are offered at several healing services during the week and on an individual basis by appointment. Our objective is to fulfill Jesus's dual commission to preach the gospel of the kingdom and to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.[15] We see no conflict between prayer for healing and medical science. We view human life from a holistic perspective, that we are a unified and integrated whole being. Healing must be to the whole person. Inner healing of the spirit and soul is essential for wholeness, as is forgiveness and right relationships.

Charismatic renewal ministries

In the mid 1970s we began a ministry on college campuses in the Upper Midwest area, principally at Lutheran colleges. The ministry was named Inter-Collegiate Fellowship Renewal (ICFR), its acronym expressive of its large vision, 'I See Afar'. The goal was to share the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, known as charismatic renewal, with students. Spiritual renewal fellowship groups for Bible study, worship, prayer and ministry developed at seven colleges under ICFR's leadership. Periodic retreats drew hundreds of students for powerful weekends of worship and teaching. There was a sovereign move of the Spirit at these gatherings. Summer teams were sent to other countries to serve.

In 1972 the first International Lutheran Conference on the Holy Spirit was held in the Minneapolis Auditorium. Ten to twelve thousand attended. It hit the front pages of the local newspapers and made the news wire service. This event and subsequent conferences gave charismatic renewal high visibility. Attendance grew each year and peaked at 25,000 in 1978. North Heights played an important role from the beginning. Our staff and members did a considerable amount of the work required for this major gathering.

Lutheran Charismatic Renewal Services (LCRS) was formed to provide co-ordination and service to the movement between the conferences. North Heights conducted Institutes on Church Renewal nationally and internationally to share principles of congregational renewal so that more churches might embrace spiritual renewal and experience spiritual revitalization. A merger of

North Heights' renewal organization, International Lutheran Center for Church Renewal, and LCRS led to the formation of the International Lutheran Renewal Center (ILRC). ILRC's offices are in the North Heights complex.

Our congregation has birthed and is presently involved in several ministries which are praying, advocating and working for spiritual renewal of individuals, families and churches. For three years we conducted a television ministry called Renewal International with interview and church service formats. For a period of time our programme was telecast on twelve stations in ten states, and by cable in parts of Canada and by satellite over Western Europe. The vision was to reach the unchurched with the good news of Jesus Christ that they may receive salvation in him and to expose the churched to spiritual renewal that they may seek new life for their church.

A transforming congregation

Close to two decades ago I heard reports that a number of persons struggling with their sexual identity were attending North Heights. They came because they sensed the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our services and activities. They earnestly desired to get free from their homosexual desires and activities. They found North Heights a community of love and acceptance. In this environment they felt they could find change. Some did. Some did not. Most kept their identity private. A few shared their experience of transformation to assist others in their struggle.

This was a time of mounting pressure in the culture and society to affirm homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle. In response to this challenge our pastoral staff and church council affirmed the biblical teaching that homosexual sexual practices are a perversion of God's created order. We also affirmed the power of God to bring transformation or change, as expressed in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, in which a number of behaviours that exclude persons from the kingdom of God are listed, including those practising homosexuality. Then comes this positive grace declaration: 'And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God'.

We welcome and love gay and lesbian persons, and desire to share the good news that they can experience full transformation through the power of the gospel, by the work of the Holy Spirit and in a loving, caring community of faith. We are committed to assisting those who desire to be free from this burden. We are also committed to speaking the truth in love. In putting feet to our pledge we gave birth to a ministry to help those seeking freedom from homosexuality. It is called Eagles Wings and is staffed by members of North Heights. The director is Nancy Anderson, wife of a Baptist pastor who was seminary professor and is now a ministry director for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The assistant director, Dottie Ludwig, is a former lesbian who experienced transformation through Christ in our church. They speak in many

churches sharing the message that change is possible through the mighty transforming power of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the loving work of the Holy Spirit through a caring community of faith.

Music and drama

Ten years ago we called Thom Hardwick and his wife Jan to be minister and co-ordinator of music and drama. They brought with them unusual musical talents and the ability to attract talented musicians as well as the gift of musical drama. Their coming to North Heights has revolutionized our outreach to the region. We present two major music/drama productions annually: eight performances of *The Splendour of Christmas* in December focusing on Jesus's birth and mission and eighteen presentations of *The Passion Play* in the spring portraying Jesus's life from birth to the Second Coming. Every performance is sold out as soon as tickets go on sale. A total of 36,000 people attend the performances each year. Another 19,000 see portions at Christmas, Palm Sunday and Easter services. These productions are top-quality performances.

Such music/drama presentations are highly effective evangelism tools. We give free tickets to inner-city and multicultural churches and ministries to use as means for them to evangelize in their areas. Many of our members buy tickets for friends and relatives so they may be impacted by the life-transforming story of Jesus. At the conclusion of each performance I give an opportunity for people to respond in their hearts to the Holy Spirit's call. Many commit their lives to the Lord for the first time or rededicate their lives to him.

A major benefit is what takes place in the lives of the 450 cast members and the hundreds of others involved in the performances. This is a moving experience for the children and families partaking in the re-enactment of Jesus's life. Many use the scenes and Bible readings for their family devotions. The Bible stories come alive for children as well as for parents. Bonds are built between cast members. In a large church the building of relationships is a major continuing endeavour, so this is a valuable by-product of our music/drama productions.

Our vision is to enlarge our sanctuary in the near future to seat 4,000. We now seat 1,500. In this way we will enlarge our evangelism outreach by enabling 100,000 persons to attend our productions each year, almost three times our current capacity.

Renewal of Worship Services

In 1972 I introduced innovation to our Sunday morning worship services on a trial basis, changes which were to express the spiritual renewal taking place in our church. We substituted other elements in the Lutheran worship order to replace the liturgical forms for the purpose of bringing

fresh expression to our worship. For instance, for the Confession of Sins we prayed the Fifth Petition to the Lord's Prayer and Luther's Explanation from his Small Catechism in prayer form. Another Sunday we sang a beautiful hymn that expresses confession of sins. On other Sundays we had silent prayer or free prayer. For the Confession of Faith we declared on successive Sundays the articles of the Apostles Creed and Luther's Explanation from his Small Catechism. Other Sundays we sang hymns that were powerful declarations of faith. After the Gloria we introduced new worship choruses as ways to express worship to God from our hearts.

As an introduction to each service I called the congregation's attention to what we were about to do. The purpose was to draw the focus to the Lord and to invite the Holy Spirit to inspire worship in our hearts, as scripture declares: 'We worship by the Spirit of God'.[16] I called attention to the hymns of praise to be sung to the Lord. We were to express our praise and adoration to God.

After some months of the new focus and format I asked the congregation to write their response to the changes. Every response was positive and no one wanted to go back to the more formal style. The heart change and the format changes in worship brought spiritual renewal to the whole congregation. This was a major turning point in the life of our church. And this took place without division.

We conduct seven Sunday morning worship services in three locations on our two campuses. The flavour and style vary. The services in our large sanctuary on our newer site express a large celebration style. The pastors are robed, the 100-voice choir is robed, the organ accompanies the singing of hymns and the minister of music and worship band lead in the singing of contemporary praise songs. The services in our older 450-seat sanctuary at our first site reflect a similar style, only on a smaller scale and with a stronger blend of the traditional. The services in the 400-seat fellowship hall, also at our first site, are geared towards youth and young adults, although people of all ages attend. The style is more casual: no robes, no choir, no organ, less hymns, more youth-oriented contemporary praise and worship songs. In addition we conduct a Saturday night service geared for Generation Xers and a Sunday night charismatic prayer and praise service.

Worship of God and the word of God are central and essential in our corporate life, along with the administration of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist. Our services attract many visitors. They sense God's presence in our midst. In this context lives are transformed and healing occurs.

Major changes have taken place in worship expressions in the United States during the past dozen years. Today, several thousand Lutheran churches offer alternative forms of worship and contemporary-style services as a means of attracting the unchurched and reaching non-Lutherans. The fastest growing churches are leading the way in this trend.

Serving our Region from Two Locations

The two-campus approach has worked surprisingly well. We were able to move into a new locality with the full staff, programmes and ministries of a large church from the beginning. In this way all the resources of a mega church were employed at the start of ministry in a new location. The alternative would be to spin off a group to start a new church in a new location. They would then begin as a small church and struggle for years to be able to reach sufficient size so as to have adequate staff, space and ministries to meet the needs of seekers and parishioners.

We advertise that we are 'One Congregation Serving the Twin Cities from Two Locations'. There is a genuine sense of unity in spite of the two campuses. We strive to maintain that spirit of oneness. At first I alternated preaching between the two campuses, but now I preach more frequently at the new location because of its size and greater potential for growth. With three worship locations our pastors have more opportunities to preach than in many large churches built around the personality of the senior pastor.

A few other large Lutheran churches have started new ministry in another area but maintain full ministry at the original site and remain one congregation with two centres, and they are having success. Due to the success of this new approach to mission our denomination leaders are now suggesting this as a model for developing new starts.

Lay Ministry Training Center International

During the peak of the charismatic renewal movement I felt the need for a Bible school with a Lutheran charismatic emphasis. There was none at the time; consequently, a number of Lutheran young people who were experiencing renewal attended schools with a pentecostal theology and style, and many were lost to the Lutheran church. Some youth in charismatic renewal wanted to do short-term or longer-term ministry and needed training. Others needed healing in their lives and foundation to their new-found faith experience. These were motivating factors for founding a Bible school.

In 1982 North Heights engaged Dr Byron Schmid to develop such a school. He is an ELCA pastor and former staff member of the Lutheran Council USA and the American Lutheran Church. The design of the school incorporated these major components:

1 classroom instruction for establishing biblical and doctrinal foundation;
2 individual and group discipleship for faith formation and accountability;
3 group prayer and worship for growth in spirituality;
4 practical ministry training and involvement.

It was named Lay Ministry Training Center International (LMTC) and sub-titled 'A Lutheran School of the Bible'. It is housed on the church's Arden Hills campus. The school is now in its 16th year. David Jore, an ELCA and North Heights pastor, is the president. We seek a strong balance between word and Spirit. Some 350 students from 29 nations and 28 states have attended LMTC. Twenty-four trainees are currently enrolled in the two-year programme, one-third from overseas. One hundred graduates have gone into full-time ministry or are in further training. Some have started Bible schools in their own countries. This small training centre is making a significant impact far beyond its size.

Local and Global Missions

In 1965 the first missionary couple from North Heights was sent overseas to serve in Tanzania. Since then about 100 members have embarked for extended missionary service and hundreds have gone on short-term cross-cultural missions trips. Currently 23 couples and 12 single missionaries are serving under our Missions Department.

Six years ago North Heights called Dr Allen Swanson, former ELCA missionary and seminary professor in Taiwan, as missions pastor. Interest and involvement in urban, cross-cultural and overseas missions has increased significantly. In addition to missions support in the church's regular benevolence budget, an additional $350,000 is raised through special offerings for missionary support and missions projects.

North Heights partners with over a dozen local urban churches and inner-city ministries by providing volunteer personnel and financial assistance. These include kids' clubs; tutoring; helping renovate an inner-city warehouse into a church; conducting a Sunday school for Native American children in their sovereign tribal village in Minneapolis; summer interns and volunteer workers assisting urban churches; launching the first Christian-based safe-house for women victims of domestic abuse in the state; and purchasing a church building to launch a new urban church outreach.

For a quarter of a century a group of North Heights men has conducted an effective prison ministry. They conduct weekly Bible studies and monthly worship services in the largest prison in the state. They care for prisoners' families through a variety of services, such as assisting with support of food and finances, giving Christmas gifts to their children, servicing their vehicles, providing counselling, finding employment for family members and prisoners on their release, etc. Hundreds are touched and transformed through the love and gospel of Christ shown to them at their lowest point in life.

Over a four-year period scores of our members went to Russia to assist churches in two large cities to prepare for and engage in major evangelistic crusades conducted by a Finnish Lutheran pastor at the invitation of Russian government officials. A North Heights pastor, Greg Berglund, assisted in founding a church in Volgagrad to reach young people. These trips and other short-term outreaches enlarge the participants' vision and inspire some to enter into longer-term mission service.

Conclusion

North Heights Lutheran Church is a witness to what God is doing through people who seek the Lordship of Jesus over their lives and church and who function under the unction of the Holy Spirit. Our prayer is for the spiritual renewal of the whole church.

Notes

1 Matthew 28:18–20.
2 Mark 16:15–18.
3 Mark 16:20.
4 Luke 24:49; John 20:21–23; Acts 1:4–5, 8.
5 Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 47.
6 Ibid., p. 109.
7 Ibid., p. 161.
8 LBW, p. 121.
9 2 Corinthians 5:18, 19–20.
10 2 Corinthians 1:21, 22.
11 Ephesians 5:18. Literal Greek text: 'Be continually filled with [the] Spirit'.
12 Ephesians 4:11–12.
13 Matthew 24:14.
14 John 8:31–32.
15 Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN, publish all Dr Backus's books.
16 Matthew 10:7–8.

Renewal and Holy Spirit Movements: The Charismatic Challenge

Gottfried Rothermundt

The Third Stream

In this paper I shall look in a general way at what is – save for the ecumenical movement – the twentieth century's most significant *renewal* movement in Christianity: the charismatic movement. My focus will not be descriptive and analytical, but rather theological, attempting an evaluation of the significance of the movement for our churches in Europe and their missionary mandate. My first observation is that there is now a growing recognition that the church can never be a witness in the world unless its renewal is itself a discovery and recognition of its own identity as a communion living by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As far back as 1953 Lesslie Newbigin identified three ways of understanding the church: the Catholic, the Protestant, and the Pentecostal or charismatic stream of Christian tradition. According to the third stream the church is constituted neither by an apostolic order or structure (the Catholic view), nor by the apostolic message (the Protestant emphasis), but by the Spirit as an 'actually experienced and received reality'.[1]

It is unnecessary to discuss the merits or shortcomings of Newbigin's typology in the present context. The importance of his work lies in the fact that it was one of the great *missionary* thinkers of this century – whose neighbour I was privileged to be during my years on the staff of the Selly Oak Colleges – who made a vigorous plea for the charismatic perspective as essential for any ecclesiology. He did this a considerable time before the emergence of the charismatic wave in the 1960s and 1970s and an even longer time before his own exposure in his old age to one of the extreme expressions of the charismatic renewal within Anglicanism at Holy Trinity, Brompton, London. The point Newbigin made in his early work was this: the third stream, more than any other Christian tradition, stands for the vital insight that the church lives by the power of God's Spirit. Therefore, Newbigin argued, the charismatic stream with its emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit must be drawn into the ecumenical dialogue: 'We must acknowledge that we without them cannot be made perfect'.[2] It is my aim in this paper to bear out the validity of that statement and to articulate the challenge arising from it for Lutheran theology and mission in Europe.

A Transconfessional and Multicultural Movement

Looking today at what Newbigin called the third stream, we find a truly astounding growth of churches and groups that confess the availability of a personal Pentecostal experience of the Holy

Spirit, often accompanied by speaking in tongues and the appropriation of the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10.[3] If the Anglican demographer David B. Barrett is right, the year 2000 may present us with a denominational landscape in which the total number of what he subsumes under the category 'Pentecostals/charismatics' (562 million) outnumbers the category 'Protestant' (386 million) by 176 million – figures which, of course, still leave open to question the number of charismatics within the historic Protestant churches and within the Roman Catholic church. To be sure, statistics are outdated quickly and we should be clear at the outset that the challenge of the charismatic movement to our churches in any case does not depend on its numerical strength but on the elements of gospel truth of which it can remind us. Therefore, the question of whether or not the movement has already peaked in Europe is immaterial to the argument of the present paper. My contention is that the renewal movement should be seen as an encouragement to an honest, positive appraisal and reassessment of the essentials of the gospel. Scholars like Walter J. Hollenweger[5] (internationally known researcher on Pentecostalism), Henry I. Lederle[6] of the charismatic Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA, and others have described the movement in various ways, but there is still a fairly broad agreement on its main attributes:

- The 'classic' Pentecostalists deriving from a revival which began in the USA in the early twentieth century.
- The charismatics deriving from the upsurge in the 1960s which brought 'Pentecost' to the established denominations.
- The renewal movement of the 1980s which resulted in non-denominational groupings and networks.
- The African churches of the Spirit-type and their sister churches of the black diaspora in Europe and elsewhere, as well as similar 'indigenous' churches from the 'third world'.

In 1974 José Míguez Bonino characterized Latin American charismatic theology and spirituality with words that are still valid today. They could well stand for the charismatic movement worldwide. Bonino wrote that for the charismatic family,

> the Church is the gathering in which they experience a common immediacy of the Spirit, a liberating and transforming experience opening a new realm of existence, "the life in the Spirit" characterized by joy, freedom and love. There is among them the expectancy of the miracle – tongues, healing, prophecy – and the communal signs of solidarity – mutual help, care of the needy – but these are not so much anticipations of the coming Kingdom..., rather they are the external *rayonnement* of the spiritual life. The Church is the realm where this life becomes available and consequently the invitation to participate in the fellowship is the most significant form of service. This is what the Church is for![7]

Wanted: A New Appreciation of Religious Experience

Whatever variety of the charismatic renewal we consider, the emphasis on *religious experience* is obvious. On the other hand, Lutheranism has a deeply ingrained suspicion of personal claims for direct experience of the Holy Spirit. Often in contemporary discussions the fear surfaces that charismatic movements might be the heirs of Luther's 'Schwärmer' (enthusiast) contemporaries, whom he opposed with harsh criticism. We need to face the 'Schwärmer' trauma in our Lutheran collective memory. Only then will we be able to enter into a creative dialogue with the charismatic renewal.

Andreas Karlstadt, one of the 'Zwickau prophets' through whom Luther first encountered charismatic phenomena, was convinced that a special inner experience of the Spirit was necessary to disclose the true meaning of scripture and claimed that the external witness of the Bible was not necessary for those who have the inward testimony of the Spirit.[8] In response to that claim, Luther caricatured Karlstadt as 'he who has devoured the Holy Spirit, feathers and all' ('der den heyligen geyst mit feddern und mit all gefressen').[9] Luther feared that the 'enthusiasts' convictions 'amounted to ignoring the criterion of all revelatory experiences, namely the witness to Christ as given in scripture. In his view the charismatics of his time concentrated on the inner movements of their souls and the impact of the Spirit instead of looking outside themselves ... at the divine acceptance in spite of their actual unacceptability'.[10]

Leaving aside sixteenth-century polemics, there is a point of abiding significance that needs to be kept in mind for our discussions: The new life in Christ cannot be verified or ascertained by whatever experiences of elation, satisfaction, inward peace, healing, etc. Such experiences are always ambiguous and cannot provide a rock-bottom certainty for one's life. Ambiguity is part and parcel of all aspects of human existence and cannot be eliminated from religious life. What ultimately counts is that God considers a person righteous. All a person can do is to trust that what God says is true, even though experience may contradict it.[11]

Once this is affirmed, the way is free for a new appreciation of religious experience in a legitimate sense; not as a means to verify, let alone establish, the new life in Christ, but as part of the Christian faith, which has indeed a strong experiential dimension. Among the influential Lutheran theologians of the twentieth century this point was made most strongly by Paul Tillich. 'Faith ... does not mean the belief in assertions for which there is no evidence. It never meant that in genuine religion, and it should never be abused in this sense. But faith means being grasped by a power that is greater than we are, a power that shakes us and turns us, and transforms us and heals us. Surrender to this power is faith.'[12] Tillich 'confesses' that his Systematic Theology is 'essentially ... influenced by the Spirit-movements'.[13] Consequently, Tillich comes close to a charismatic theology in which the Spirit is seen as God present with shaking, inspiring and transforming power. There is in fact a lot of scriptural evidence for such a view. The Bible abounds with the 'language of experience'. There are the inaugural visions of the Old Testament prophets (e.g. Isaiah 6), visions of awe-inspiring encounters with God. In the

gospels we find any number of instances where people meeting Jesus are touched, fascinated, shaken, perplexed, etc., i.e. affected in their whole being. For Paul the kingdom of God is not only characterized by 'righteousness', but is also experienced as 'peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Romans 14:17). Indeed, the Christian religion has not only a doctrinal, ethical and social, but first and foremost an experiential dimension. Even in classical Lutheran doctrine of the seventeenth century, which has often been accused of arid intellectualism, the *affectus cordis*, i.e. 'being affected in one's heart', is an essential goal of any theology. Thus I can only agree with Krister Stendahl: 'Opening up the full spectrum of religious experience and expression is badly needed in those churches that have suppressed the charismatic dimension. ... And no religious tradition can renew itself without the infusion of raw and fresh primary religious experience. It could well be that the charismatic movement is given to the churches as one such infusion.'[14]

I vividly remember my first worship experience with a Pentecostal church in a suburb of Chicago in 1962. It was a black congregation of the 'Progressive Church of God in Christ'. These people were surprised when a white person turned up to worship with them. After a short moment of hesitation on the part of the congregation at what could appear to some as an intrusion of a curious outsider, I was invited to sit up front. The modest church was quickly filled with organ music and the clapping of hands as the dancing procession of the white-robed choir brought movement into the room. There were prayers, a scripture reading and sermon; a woman moved towards the altar to give a public testimony of healing. When I was asked whether I could give a testimony, I was immensely embarrassed and declined. The intercessory prayers brought into the open the needs and concerns of a socially deprived people with amazing candour. The service moved on with acts of joy like dancing, jumping, shouts of hallelujah, etc. Choruses were sung, the tempo rising with rhythmical clapping. In the middle of a chorus a little girl of maybe three years handed me her tambourine and I clumsily tried to find the beat which the little child had so perfectly mastered. On my way home I wondered whether I would ever be able to feel in my bones the liberating message of the gospel with an intensity comparable to what I had witnessed with those charismatic fellow Christians. To be sure, I could not agree with the biblical literalism of the assembly. I also felt that their songs where lacking the profundity of our Lutheran hymnody. Yet there was a disturbing thing: I could not have wished that the people with whom I had been together would become members of any of the Lutheran churches I knew in North America, Europe or elsewhere. It dawned on me that we need the charismatics to correct the one-sidedness of our interpretations and traditions, so that the fullness of the whole Christian faith is not lost.

Charismatic Impulses for Our Churches in Europe

If that is so, there is no question of mainstream Lutheranism in Europe shaping its patterns of worship and mission after Pentecostal models. I am not a charismatic, nor are the majority of us present at this consultation, nor are the churches and mission societies we represent. Constrained efforts at imitating charismatic patterns of life and worship are counter-productive. It is, however, worthwhile to ponder aspects of charismatic life and witness which we need for our enrichment,

correction and renewal. The Lutheran churches are challenged to interpret charismatic experiences in the context of *their* theology and spirituality. In doing so, we may find that our tradition includes much more than what we actually realize and live and that an encounter with the charismatic renewal may help us to become more authentic witnesses of the knowledge of Christ. It could well be that we need that challenge for our own theological and spiritual health. My emphasis, therefore, is on the creative potential of the movement rather than on its problems. I suggest four areas for our consideration.

The challenge of healing

Charismatic churches and renewal movements remind us that the New Testament stories of healing are an essential part of the ministry of Jesus. They rightfully assert healing as an element of the church's mandate. This is a necessary reminder, particularly for our churches in the North. If you listen in one of our European Lutheran churches to a sermon on one of Jesus's miracles of healing, you are likely to hear that in God's purpose and design our political, economic and personal relationships must be and can be healed.[15] This is certainly true, yet is it enough to state this? Have we not been unduly spiritualizing texts like 'Heal the sick and say to them: the kingdom of God has come near to you' (Luke 10:9)? Christianity is a therapeutic religion. There is no reason to question the direct physical and mental significance of the charism of healing as a gift of the Spirit. Only after asserting this primary meaning is it right to state that Christians are called to fight the forces of 'spiritual' diseases that control the life of society, etc. We can be grateful that healing has become a recognizable feature of Christianity through charismatic churches, particularly in Africa. On this continent as in other cultures of the 'third world' it is beyond dispute that a disease is never only a medical problem, but also an expression of a disturbed relationship, be it to oneself, to other people, to the deceased, to the clan or to nature. Archbishop Emmanuel Milingo from Zambia, known for his remarkable gift of healing, once said: 'We are not monopolizing healing as only existing in the Christian church. We are only saying that a Christian who uses the name of Jesus as he prays for the sick, has learnt the formula from the gospel of Christ'.[16]

Such modesty is not always evident in faith healers. When religion is understood primarily as a means of reinforcing life, health is easily misunderstood in terms of an increase of power and prosperity. Here the Lutheran theology of the cross will caution us. The power and strength that God provides cannot be measured in such a way. God's power may also appear under the guise of human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9) and ill health. Unlike the 'power evangelists' with their 'signs and wonders' message, we should not construe healing as a basis of effective mission. 'A triumphal church is in the end a weakened church. The historical spread of Christian faith reflects this. ... A credible witness is in the end a vulnerable and fragile witness.'[17]

The challenge of pluriformity

What we need in our churches is openness to the spiritual experience of God's presence and the manifestation of many *different* gifts of grace. Yet there are obstacles. In European Lutheran

churches charismatics are frequently put on the defensive and find it difficult to stand their ground against an alliance of ecclesiastical establishment and psychological criticism. Moreover, the norms of tradition in liturgy and churchmanship are often used as measuring rods to judge the right or legitimacy of different types of worship, new songs, liturgical practices, forms of prayer, exercise of the gift of healing, etc. Local congregations are sometimes refused a pastor of their choice on the grounds that he or she being a charismatic will neither be willing nor able to minister to 'ordinary' parishioners. There is also the fear of special congregations developing with the self-understanding of being oases in an alleged spiritual desert. If small or not so small groups cultivate their own forms of worship with such an understanding they are likely to raise the old trauma of pietistic *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* ('little churches in the church'), a fear which is not altogether unwarranted.

On the other hand, it must be stressed that 'the attempt to preserve a uniform culture and consequently a traditionally handed-down uniform worship service has never been the aim of Lutheran theology. The introduction of the vernacular into worship against the background of a thousand or more years of Latin liturgy is proof of this.[18] It is about time to say good-bye to the illusion of a homogeneous church, not only on sociological but also on theological grounds. Holding on to it in a pluralistically differentiated context is counter-productive and will only result in an increasing number of Lutherans leaving their church. It is curious that a church tradition like ours, with its emphasis on carrying God's mission across different frontiers of religions, ideologies, etc.,[19] should be unable to cross the borderlines of different spiritual cultures in its own midst. It does not make sense to advocate the missionary principle of inculturation and contextualization of the gospel in 'foreign' countries, while at the same time to refuse different spiritual 'milieux' to flourish within the garden of a Lutheran church in Europe. For the unity of the church, unity of 'ceremonial' – to use the classical term of the Lutheran confessional writings – is not necessary. It would be good to remember that wisdom from the Augsburg Confession (Article 7) in the present discussion. It is certainly relevant to a discussion on alternative forms and styles of worship. Moreover, I think it is legitimate to extend the meaning of 'ceremonial' beyond its primary meaning to include a wide spectrum of experiences of faith and styles of piety (such as meditative, mystical, liturgical, charismatic and other spiritualities). We need no uniformity in that respect to maintain the unity of the church. None of these spiritualities which are themselves charisms has a claim to absoluteness. The Spirit working in the church must not be suppressed by putting down the manifestations of its own vitality. We do however need to remember that the discernment of spirits – or shall we say spiritualities? – is also a manifestation of the Spirit.[20]

The challenge of communion

In my view, this is the strongest challenge the renewal movements pose to our churches.

While I lived in Birmingham I came to know a black Christian who had emigrated to Britain from the Caribbean in the 1960s. He had been an Anglican in his native country, but once in Britain he could not find a place to feel at home in the Church of England, the mother church of

Anglicanism. I am afraid the same would have been the case had he been a Lutheran on the European continent. He said he could not understand how his good Christian fellow parishioners could be so reserved and so protective about their own privacy and so unwilling to speak about their own faith. How could Christians subscribe to the English saying 'A fence between keeps friendship green'? he asked, and added sarcastically: 'In that church you may be allowed to have feelings, but it is better not to show them'. Eventually he joined one of the black Pentecostal churches, where he found himself no longer a stranger and sojourner, but a fellow citizen with the saints and a member of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). His case is paradigmatic. The charismatic churches challenge us to think anew about the *communion quality* of our faith. 'The reason why many people feel that God is dead, is the absence of communities in which they can experience his presence.'[21] The charismatics are right in saying that the local Christian community is the place where fellowship is experienced and lived. This is not only true of people who belong to the 'black diaspora' finding a place where their emotional needs are fulfilled and where they are unconditionally accepted – even as socially stigmatized people with their painful experiences of brokenness and despair. The real basis of fellowship which makes people part of the *communio sanctorum* is the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in that group of people. Indeed, communion is getting one's life in the flow of the stream. This is where fellowship originates, not in the socializing part of a 'time of fellowship' over a cup of coffee *after* the worship service.

The consequences of that conviction are manifold. One of them has been called the 'egalitarian streak' in the renewal's emphasis on the spiritual giftedness of every participant. This dimension challenges received patterns of clericalism of any tradition.[22] Fundamentally there is no distinction between active and passive members.

Where the local congregation is the powerhouse of Christian life, Christian nurture is not so much a matter of organized transparochial programmes of education. It rather develops organically from the fertile soil of a lively local church. This was also the principle that led the Lutheran churches of the former GDR to their slogan 'Gemeinde als Lernort' ('the local congregation as place of learning'). In another context I have observed that the programmes of the 'Black and White Christian Partnership', a predominantly charismatic initiative in Britain, has taken strong elements of worship and mutual personal counselling into their classrooms as parts of the process of studying and learning.

These observations have an obvious bearing on *mission* . The very presence of a vital local church beckons people to 'come and see'. People come on their own initiative. One of my Hindu neighbours in India told me: 'If you are sugar, the ants will come to you', a statement reminiscent of Mahatma Gandhi, who said 'The highest truth is self-propelling. It radiates its influence silently as a rose its fragrance'. We need not share the anti-evangelistic bias of Gandhi – something that is obviously worlds apart from the evangelistic dynamic of charismatic churches – but we may be prompted by Gandhi's words to remember the old insight that in mission there is a dialectic of 'go-structure' and 'come-structure'. The 'come-structure' accounts for the somewhat magnetic effect that has led, for example in Latin American Pentecostal churches, to

a kind of chain reaction of spontaneous, self-sustaining growth.[23] Are our structures and the dynamic of our congregations in Europe appropriate to a church endeavouring to live as a communion?

The challenge of praise

Over the centuries the Lutheran tradition has emphasized the importance of Christian *doctrine*. Sometimes this has been an over-emphasis. Thus the old quip 'For Lutherans the church is a school'. During the past two decades or so we Lutherans and other churches of mainstream Protestantism have been rightly reminded by the Orthodox and even more by the charismatics that worship means being open and ready for the action of God and the Holy Spirit and responding to God in adoration and praise. Charismatic worship praises God with an emphasis on the Lordship of Christ in songs, choruses and simultaneous vocal praise. Some of it may be of varied quality, but the impact of these choruses, etc., on our churches could again be a salutary reminder. Praise itself is a gift of the Spirit. This can be felt most convincingly when charismatic groups who are socially marginalized sing vibrant praises of God in the midst of situations of distress – as Paul and Silas sang their praises in jail in the middle of the night.

The desire to worship, though covered over in the modern world, is deep-seated. In recognizing and responding to the supreme worth of God the whole of life takes on a new sense of value. If our churches radiated something of that recognition, they would be showing that they have understood the charismatic challenge.

Notes

1 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church.* SCM Press, London 1953, 88.
2 Ibid., 109.
3 Cf. Peter Hocken, 'Charismatic Movement', in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva 1991, 145.
4 For David B. Barrett's statistical figures see his annual surveys in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research.*
5 Walter J. Hollenweger, *Charismatisch-pfingstliches Christentum. Herkunft. Situation. Ökumenische Chancen.* Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1997.
6 Henry I. Lederle, 'The Spirit of Unity: A Discomforting Comforter. Some Reflections on the Holy Spirit, Ecumenism and the Pentecostal–Charismatic Movements', *The Ecumenical Review* vol. 42, nos. 3–4, 1990, 279–87.
7 José Miguez Bonino, 'A Latin American Attempt to Locate the Question of Unity', *The Ecumenical Review* vol. 26, no. 2, 1974, 214.
8 Cf. Carter Lindberg, *Charismatic Renewal and the Lutheran Tradition* (LWF Report 21), LWF Geneva 1985, 36.
9 'Wider die himmlischen Propheten, von den Bildern und Sakrament', WA 18, 66.

10 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1963, 128.
11 Carter Lindberg, *Charismatic Renewal*, 42.
12 Paul Tillich, *The New Being*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1955, 38.
13 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* vol. III, 126.
14 Krister Stendahl, 'The New Testament Evidence', in *The Charismatic Movement*, ed. Michael P. Hamilton, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 1975, 56 ff.; quoted from Carter Lindberg, *Charismatic Renewal*, 75.
15 Walter J. Hollenweger, 'Heilet die Kranken!', *Theologica Practica* vol. 22, no. 1, 1987, 46ff.
16 Quoted from Hans-Jürgen Becken and Christoffer Grundmann, 'Cultural Emancipation and the Third World', *Mission Studies* vol. 3, no. 2, 1986, 62.
17 'The Desire of God'. The Message of the Congress on the World Mission of the Church: St Paul '98, St Paul, Minnesota, 23–27 June 1998, 2ff.
18 Vilmos Vajta, 'Worship and Sacramental Life', in *The Lutheran Church Past and Present*, ed. Vilmos Vajta, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis 1977, 141.
19 *Together in God's Mission: An LWF Contribution to the Understanding of Mission*, LWF documentation no. 26, Geneva 1988, 5.
20 See Reinhart Hummel, *Religiöser Pluralismus oder christliches Abendland?*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1994, 105.
21 H. M. Schulz, *Damit die Kirche lebt*, Mainz 1975; quoted from 'Towards a Church Renewed and United in the Spirit (Statement from a WCC advisory group)', *The Ecumenical Review* vol. 31, no. 3, 1979, 306.
22 Peter Hocken, 'Charismatic Movement', 146.
23 José Miguez Bonino, 'Vorweggenommene Entwicklungen? Christentum in den USA und Lateinamerika', in *Jahrbuch Mission 1997*, Missionshilfeverlag, Hamburg 1997, 75.

Awakening Movements in Madagascar

Rakoto Endor Modeste

Introduction

> And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my Spirit. ... And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered.

Before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit ... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

> For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.
>
> Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.

These are the words often cited by the Awakening Movements in Madagascar to justify their existence. They are the fulfilment of these words of God.

The Awakening Movements in Madagascar started within the Malagasy Lutheran Church in 1894. It is a call to live one's faith thoroughly in the triune God by word and deed, in fear, love and trust in the Lord more than anything else. Emphasis is placed on actually living the meaning of the three articles of faith in the Apostles' Creed, which are further amplified by the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

All activities of the movements have to derive from and advance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ. Activities are also tested on the basis of the scriptures and the inherited teachings of the Spiritual Founder, for certitude as to their divine appointment.

There are four major types of awakening movements in Madagascar. The Awakening Movement of Soatanàna, the Awakening Movement of Manolotrony, the Awakening Movement of Ankaramalaza, and the Awakening Movement of Farihimena. Each bears the name of the village

it started in or where it established its national centre. All four movements preach the gospel to all people, and train shepherds for mission, and care of the sick and the poor in their own parishes and in the awakening movement villages or 'toby'.

Four Awakening Movements

The Awakening Movement of Soatanàna started in October 1894, just before colonization of the nation began. A Lutheran catechist named Rainisoalambo was its founder and leader. His personal awakening in the village of Ambatoreny Soatanàna marked the beginning of the movement. The mission he received from Jesus was to preach the love of God with words and deeds and to urge people to love one another. Many came to hear the gospel he preached. Many were saved and healed from sickness. He instituted two religious orders among his disciples: the 'mpiandry' (shepherds) and the 'iraka' (apostles). The iraka were to teach the mpiandry. Both were to preach, cast out demons, and lay on hands; this is what the movement calls 'Asa' (casting out of demons) and 'Fampaherezana' (laying on of hands and prayer for strength). He worked within the church and instituted many 'toby', villages (or centres) where people would come with their sick to be cured with prayers. This movement still exists within the Malagasy Lutheran Church, though a faction detached from it in 1954 to form an independent church. This division resulted from conflicts which started within the movement itself.

The Awakening Movement of Manolotrony started in 1900, the year annual taxes were imposed by the colonizers on each adult male of the population. A lay women named Ravelonjanahary was its founder and leader. Her personal awakening started the movement. Her mission was to preach the humility of Jesus in words and deeds. In the name of Jesus she performed many miracles. She died and rose again many times. She instituted the mpiandry and the iraka like Rainisoalambo. Her disciples are the most conservative of all the awakening movements within the church, as they require even the pastors of the reformed church, to which they belong, to be commissioned apostles before they are allowed to consecrate any mpiandry or iraka.

The Awakening Movement of Ankaramalaza started in August 1941, when Malagasy men were selected to be sent to the Second World War. A lay Lutheran woman named Volahavana Germaine or Nenilava was the founder and leader of the movement. Her mission was to preach Jesus Christ in word and deed, and to promote faith in him. She died and rose again once at the beginning of her ministry. Her death was a journey to heaven so she could be taught the scriptures by Jesus himself. She saw the Lord Jesus with her own eyes and continued to communicate with him visually and vocally all the days of her life. Mama Volahavana Germaine preached the gospel throughout most of the nation, cast out demons and laid on hands. She performed many miracles. She instituted the ministry of mpiandry among her disciples and established many toby.

The Awakening Movement of Farihimena started in 1946. The Second World War had just ended and the bloody political revolt of 1947 was about to commence. A trained Lutheran pastor, Rakotozandry Daniel, was the founder and leader of the movement. He gathered the Christians in his parish and motivated them for a life of repentance. The power of the word of God and God's Spirit was felt by the Christians through signs and wonders. Pastor Rakotozandry was noted as a severe teacher of the scriptures. He was in bad health and died two years after he began the movement.

All four founders recognized Jesus as the one who called them for special ministry at a special time. None of them thought their movement would become a department within their respective national churches.

All four awakening movements have similarities and differences in such matters as the casting out of demons and the laying on of hands. Soatanàna is closer to Manolotrony in these respects, Farihimena closer to Ankaramalaza. They all read four scriptural passages before the rite of casting out demons and laying on of hands: John. 14:12–17; Mark 16:15–20; Matthew 18:18–20 and John. 20:21–3. Prayer precedes and ends the readings. All four agreed to work together and respect each other for the sake of the gospel and of the Holy Spirit, whom they all believe to be the founder of their spiritual movements.

I shall describe in more detail the Awakening Movement of Ankaramalaza as an example of the four.

Ankaramalaza

The word Jesus gave to Mama Volahavana Germaine was Isaiah 54. It constituted the basis on which she built her strength and hope in her ministry. Her husband was a very old man and she was without a child. In her work God would be her redeemer and provider, and through her work Jesus would grant her many spiritual children blessed with a promise of prosperity in the Lord. Mama Volahavana started her ministry by casting out demons and preaching the good news of the Lord Jesus. She claimed that Jesus himself led her in all that she did. What she performed in the name of Jesus in her ministry can be summarized in the words of Luke 4:18–19.

Good news to the poor

'Poor' is understood to designate those who do not have Christ or who are still playing with sin and the devil, like the prodigal son (Luke 15). This is illustrated in the preaching of the gospel which calls all to realize the destitution and darkness they are in, and come to Jesus the source of life and light.

Preaching includes testimony of one's own or another's conversion to the faith and a committed Christian life. The word of witness makes the work of Christ central in the believer's life. It attests that Jesus is alive and active for our salvation. All are welcome to faith in the living Christ, as his mercy is ample for all sinners. All are affirmed in their reconciliation with God their Father in Jesus Christ.

Release to the captives

Through the preaching of the gospel Jesus breaks the shackles the devil puts on people. All who believe in him are saved from the power of the devil. The symptoms of demon possession are discerned through reactions to hearing the name of Jesus when the holy scriptures are taught and proclaimed. Those who do not like the name of the Lord Jesus Christ manifest revolt when they simply hear the gospel. Some react when pressed further with an order from the preacher to the demons to move out of the people of God. These reactions are visible in bodily movements or audible in the words that are uttered. Such cases occur in the ministry of Jesus in the gospels: Mark 3:11; 5:6–13; Luke 4:33–5. Similar cases arise in the ministry of the word in Madagascar. Jesus's disciples were given authority and power to cast out demons (Mark 3:13–15). Such a privilege is also given at the present time to all believers and to all commissioned preachers and shepherds (Mark 16:17–18). They can cast out demons in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Demoniacs are calm and in their right mind when demons have left them (Mark 5:15). The hearing of the name of Jesus is welcomed and the healed persons are even willing to confess that Jesus saved them. Many things are erased from their lives when the demons no longer have power over them. Any fetishes, charms and talismans have to be burned; then actual commitment to the faith is made evident, and a lasting period of health is expected. The healed person recognizes the destructive realities of the ways of their past, confesses the goodness of the life in Christ and dedicates their future life to Jesus. They are encouraged to stand and witness to their faith; this event has to be brought to light and explained in accordance with the holy scriptures (Romans 10:8–11).

Sight to the blind

Prayer is always said for the spiritual and physical healing of the sick. Genuine miracles, however, are not expected to be performed at the believers' request, despite fervent prayers. Healing is always at Jesus's hands and occurs according to his powerful will and at his proper time.

The same rite of exorcism is performed on those who want spiritual healing and on those who want mental and physical healing. The preaching of the word comes first, the repentance of the believers follows, then the casting out of the demons which precedes the laying on of hands.

When miracles do occur during these worship services, some do so in a spectacular manner and in a very short time; some happen gradually as the newly awakened persons come repeatedly to services. Both biological illness and mental illness can be healed.

The primary goal of the ministry of 'Asa sy Fampaherezana' (casting out of demons and laying on of hands) is the acceptance of Jesus as one's personal saviour. In every service the preaching of the gospel takes the indispensable role of making this aim utterly clear.

Liberty to those who are oppressed

Jesus proclaimed and brought forgiveness and freedom. Such is also the mission of the believers: to proclaim and to deliver in the name of Jesus. They spend time and energy to implore Jesus to make true his promises to his people now. Freedom denotes deliverance from sin, from eternal death and from the devil. The social and economic connotations of freedom are the subsequent effects of this primary definition. The priority of the spiritual significance of the redemption Jesus offers believers has to be uplifted clearly. The priority of the spiritual does not negate the material meaning, but takes precedence and dominates over it.

The primary denotation is manifested in the renewal of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, making each individual a new creation in themselves and in their relationship with others (2 Corinthians 5:14–21). As a renewed person they are equipped with spiritual gifts for the ministry of proclamation and for the assurance of the triune God's continuous presence.

The acceptable year of the Lord

The acceptable year is based on the salvation Jesus provided on the cross and inaugurated in the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. It involves the reconciliation of all sinners to God the Father through Jesus Christ and the reconciliation of all people among themselves in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:1; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Nothing will prevent any of God's promised blessings being poured out and shared among the people. To the people of the Awakening Movements the acceptable year is manifested every day in the fulfilment of the promise stated in Matthew 28:20, that Jesus will always be with believers. Mark 16:20 testifies that signs accompany such a presence of the Lord, among which are the casting out of demons and the laying on of hands (Mark 16:17–18).

This reconciliation with God the Father through Jesus Christ constitutes the acceptable year.

The Details

Prayer (Acts 2:42; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Life in prayer is key to the people of the Awakening Movement. All is accomplished only through a close relationship with Jesus, as Colossians 3:17 attests: 'Whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.'

Preaching (Acts 2 – 3)

Preaching based on the holy scriptures constitutes a major part of the activities of the movement. The Holy Spirit works through the word of God to convict people of their sin and leads them to repentance and forgiveness. Preaching can also start from personal testimony.

The word is preached to Christians and gentiles, to the sick and to the demoniacs, so that they accept the Holy Spirit, who works salvation in them every day of their lives. Only those moved by the Spirit are called children of God (Romans 8:12–17, 23).

Counselling (Luke 22:32; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 3:14–17)

Sick people and their loved ones need counselling. Passages from the scriptures are given for them to read and reflect upon. Old and new converts alike are advised to pray, read the Bible daily, find a Christian support group, and lead a Christian way of life. The shepherds are usually the leaders of these groups. They lead new converts into a deeper commitment in their faith.

Casting out of demons (Luke 11:20–6)

According to Mark 16:15–18, casting out demons constitutes a part of the life in the faith. Christians of the Awakening Movement practise it daily. In a worship service the casting out of demons follows the preaching of the word and precedes the laying on of hands. Everyone who comes to be exorcized sits in front, either on the floor or in the pews. The shepherds, male and female, robed in white, stand and sweep the air with their hands, and command in the name of Jesus of Nazareth that demons leave the person. This sentence is repeated many times and in various ways.

Demoniacs shake their heads in refusal, or react offensively with spitting, kicking, removing their clothes, swearing, or even going into convulsions or a trance. When they recover their lucidity then it is believed that the demon has left them. The shepherds lay hands on them and say a prayer.

The individuals with mental or physical sickness are treated the same way. The physically sick person usually has no noticeable rebellious reaction during exorcism. Sometimes the mentally sick person does react, depending on their character and the kind of sickness they have. The shepherd then lays hands on them.

Most believers, sick or otherwise, experience a growing spiritual health after each worship service. They go home strengthened in the Lord.

Laying on of hands (Mark 16:18)

Only shepherds or pastors lay hands on people. They are the ones commissioned by the church to do so. For the Ankaramalaza revival movement, people who want to be laid hands on will come and kneel in front of the shepherds when the casting out of demons ends. Those who cannot kneel sit on a pew. The shepherds lay hands as follows: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth each one of them puts their right hand on top of the head of an individual and prays for them.

Prayer varies. It can be a request for forgiveness of sins, or a solicitation of strength, of renewal of the Holy Spirit, or a plea for the recovery of health or for more specific material wishes and spiritual gifts, or a supplication for a resolution to a family problem. The prayer at laying on of hands ends with an assurance of peace with the Lord, a pronouncement of forgiveness of sin, or an exhortation expressed in the name of Jesus to accept the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Significance of the Activities

Jesus is alive (Matthew 18 – 20; 28:18–20)

Jesus rose from the dead and now lives not only in heaven but also among his believers. He is the one who sends for mission and works with those whom he sends (Mark 16:15–20).

Holy Spirit acts personally (Acts 1 – 2)

The Holy Spirit has to be invoked for guidance and strength. The Holy Spirit enables believers to lead a new life in Jesus Christ and to defeat the devil in all its attempts to impart unbelief. Only the Holy Spirit through the holy scriptures can bring one back to repentance and faith in the forgiveness of sin. In this way, life shattered by sin can start anew by the power of the Holy Spirit and on account of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation starts here and now (Luke 11:20)

The power of Jesus is not limited to past events or to an eschatological future. His salvation comes every day to his people in all aspects of their lives at the present time. His action is to be seen in the ordinary routines of life and in the extraordinary ones, as all is lived in and through

prayer for his continuous presence and intervention as Lord of each individual believer's own personal history.

Goals

Preservation of faith (Luke 18:8)

Life of constant prayer is promoted (1 Thessalonians 5:17) so that people will stay in the faith and the gospel will be preached and lived until Jesus comes.

Reaching out actively (Luke 11:14–26)

People face more than one obstacle on their way to Jesus and in their life in the faith. The devil is the chief enemy who manages to build up hindrances. All believers are to join forces to fight the devil as a common enemy, and to make the hearing and the acceptance of the faith more accessible to many.

Each preacher and exorcist acts like the bearers of the paralytic in Mark 2:3–5. They are committed not only to enable the sick to hear the word of the Lord, but also to remove all obstruction in order to let captives of all kinds be set free of their shackles by Jesus.

Making each convert a new militant

The Awakening Movement urges each convert to live Jesus's words in Matthew 10:7–8: 'As you go proclaim the good news. ... You received without payment; give without payment.' Every single believer has to participate in the propagation of the gospel. Such activity pertains to the main significance of life (1 Corinthians 9:16; Romans 1:16). Giving material things is good but spiritual gifts have to be shared as well (1 Corinthians 12).

The Awakening Movement and the Institutional Church

The Awakening Movements constitute a department within their respective churches. The department works under the supervision of the institutional church. Three Awakening Movements are within the Malagasy Lutheran Church: Soatanàna, Ankaramalaza, Farihimena. One pertains to the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar: Manolotrony. The denomination of the devotees and that of the Awakening Movement they associate with does differ sometimes. For example, a personal adherent of the Awakening of Ankaramalaza is not always a Lutheran.

The shepherds, who are the leaders in the Awakening Movement, receive their biblical and practical training of two years from the ordained pastors of the churches. The president of the synod or bishop officially commissions them for the work of the shepherds. Only after such a commissioning are they allowed to lay on hands.

Leaders of the Awakening Movement of Ankaramalaza accept people from all denominations. People from non-Lutheran backgrounds can even become shepherds as long as they are willing to be trained according to the preset curriculum and by designated teachers. However, they also have to confess and preach that sinners are saved only by faith in Jesus and solely on account of the redemption Jesus performed on the cross.

The four Awakening Movements recognize one baptism alone, the one with water and in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The spiritual gifts are not the baptism of the Holy Spirit but the equipping of the believers for the ministry of proclamation and of the building up of the body of Christ who is the church (1 Corinthians 12 – 14; Ephesians 4:11–16).

The movements confess Jesus as healer and life-giver. All four also accept modern medicine as a gift from God. Shepherds allow the use of medicine, but advise the clear separation of these two independent but complementary practices: cure in the name of Jesus and medicine. The Department of Health within the Malagasy Lutheran Church admits this separation but regards Jesus as the sole healer even in the scientific endeavour to help patients recover. It established for itself the motto 'We treat, Jesus heals'.

The Awakening Movements cherish their heritage and hold fast to them. Problems usually occur when the practices taught by the founders of the revival movements are challenged or changed by the institutional church leaders. The Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar made a reform in its Awakening Movement, imposing some alteration to basic practices inherited from the founder. A long crisis within the department started with this reform: some 15,000 of its awakened adherents, including 600 shepherds, moved to the Lutheran Church despite strong official dissuasion from both institutional churches. Numerous disciples also joined different, smaller denominations.

Conclusion

The church is the Lord's. God guides and preserves the church, i.e. us, in faith through the holy scriptures and the tested confessions, but also with the sacraments and authentic signs and wonders of God's presence in our daily lives (Mark 16:17–20).

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